

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 1

*Sweet dreams are made of this
Who am I to disagree?
Travel the world and the seven seas
Everybody's looking for something
Some of them want to use you
Some of them want to get used by you
Some of them want to abuse you
Some of them want to be abused*

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Some of them want to abuse you
Some of them want to be abused*

*I wanna use you and abuse you
I wanna know what's inside you
(Whispering) Hold your head up, movin' on
Keep your head up, movin' on
Hold your head up, movin' on
Keep your head up, movin' on
Hold your head up, movin' on
Keep your head up, movin' on
Movin' on!*

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*I'm gonna use you and abuse you
I'm gonna know what's inside
Gonna use you and abuse you
I'm gonna know what's inside you*

During my eleventh year in the Army, 1982, a gal named Annie Lennox, a member of a British duo, had her first and only hit in the US. The duo known as the Eurythmics,

teamed for about 10 years. Can't say the orange hair was appealing nor her wearing a man's business suit, but it sold records. Used it for the title, but I digress.

Had my twenty in ninety-one at the rank of Master Sergeant and was having problems deciding whether or not to go for thirty and 75% retirement pay. Thing about it was somewhere along the way, they changed the retirement rules. In the old days, when you retired at twenty or more years, your military pension started when you retired. Over a period of years, the system went through multiple changes. In my case, I was covered by the old system because I enlisted in 1971. One of the changes eliminated the 30 year cap and if I stayed 40, I could draw 100% of my monthly pay for my last month of active duty. The choices were to retire at twenty and draw 50%, get thirty and draw 75% or try to do the full forty and get the 100%.

I had an Infantry MOS (eventually 11Z5O00YY) and with each passing year, the physical fitness requirements became more difficult due to developing osteoarthritis. My body was simply wearing out faster with each succeeding year. After considering my options, I opted to go for thirty.

Beginning with my second enlistment, I socked away ten percent of my take home pay in a money market account (MMA) with the Franklin Fund and sent them a check every payday. I also elected to roll any earnings back into the account. The MMA was a compromise that balanced the growth of my savings against availability. Being single allowed me to go one step further. I kept a savings account at the bank where I had my checking account and added another ten percent in that savings account and rolled the savings into CDs when I had enough.

When I made E-6, I moved to the Bachelor NCO quarters. Since I only drank occasionally, the NCO Club was adequate entertainment and I saw every movie when they came out. In addition to the Club and the movies, I spent three days a week at the body building gym staying in shape.

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During 1986, the government began to sell gold and silver bullion coins and I began diverting the funds in my checking, savings and CDs into US gold and silver Eagles. Thus once a month or every six weeks, I converted my savings into precious metals. Due to fluctuating market prices of gold and silver, purchase intervals varied between 4, 6 and 8 weeks and the coins were in my rented lock box at the bank.

During 1987, I began to reduce the amount of time at the body building gym and got involved in Single Action Shooting (SAS). A portion of the money going to the precious metals was diverted to equipment for my new hobby and I acquired, over a period of time, three Colt single action revolvers and a Winchester carbine in .45 Colt. My gun leather was purchased mail order from Alfonso's of Hollywood and Kirkpatrick Leather Company.

Alfonso carried the Paladin holster with the Sterling Paladin and Kirkpatrick provided the Laredoan Cross draw rig with silver Conchos for my 4¾" and 5½" Colts. They also supplied a scabbard for my 24" Winchester. To round out my SAS collection, I purchased a Bond Derringer and side hammer reproduction Coach Gun. Thereafter, my purchases were limited to full power and cowboy loads for my .45s and 12-pellet 00 for the Coach Gun.

By 1989, I had that collection of firearms complete save one rifle, a Marlin 1895 Cowboy in .45-70 Government which I purchased in 1990 along with a second scabbard. Unfortunately I didn't really become proficient enough with the single actions, Coach Gun and rifles and slowly lost interest in competing in my new hobby. I held onto my weapons because they were increasing in value and when I could get a really good price on ammo, I added to my stores.

By this time, I began to develop an interest in battle weapons and my first purchase was a Para Ordnance P-14 with a Warthawg as a backup piece. I also picked up a Mossberg 590A1 Marine Corps shotgun. After I got back from Desert Storm, I took the wad of cash I'd accumulated in my checking account and ordered a Springfield Armory M1A Super Match with a Douglas carbon steel barrel glass bedded in a McMillan synthetic stock. Since the purchase predated the Assault Weapons Ban, the flashhider had a bayonet lug and I was able to get a box of 25 20-round magazines from a buddy in logistics.

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My reenlistment bonus bought a fair amount of bullion coins and I persuaded the same buddy into providing a supply of M118LR ammo. I invited him along to try out the Super Match and he was impressed enough to supply more ammo for each of us and to start saving for his own rifle.

My next purchase was a Nightforce 8-32x56mm mil dot scope. Within a year, Jack had his own Super Match, although he chose the Marine Corps cammo stock and a stainless steel barrel. Somewhere, he came up with night vision rails and we had a local gunsmith install them.

"Jack, do you have night vision to install on the rifles?"

"Not yet, but I'm working on it. There's this vendor, Omni Tech Partners Group, that's supposed to be bringing out a replacement for their Universal Night Sight called the Magnum Universal Night Sight. They're built to stand up to the recoil of the M107."

"Sounds expensive."

"They are; but, they're available to the public so I'm going to see if I can get twelve and report only receiving eight."

“Why would we want two apiece?”

“You know the company that made your rifle stock?”

“McMillan?”

“Yeah. They’re developing an improved .50 caliber bolt action sniping rifle. While the rifle is available now, the improved rifle is supposed to be available by Y2K.”

“Long time to wait.”

“Yep. Have you priced a Barrett?”

“No, why?”

“The McMillan sells for less and is more accurate.”

“How do you know about it?”

“I’m originally from Phoenix and know a guy who works there. I’ve already started saving for the improved version. You’re single; it shouldn’t take you long to save up for the rifle.”

“I actually have the money now... I’m rather frugal.”

“Wait for the new model and I’ll work on the night vision. Where are you from?”

“Arkansas Ozarks. Ever heard of Mountain Home?”

“Nope. Where is that in relation to Little Rock?”

“It’s north near the state line and between Bull Shoals Lake and Norfolk Lake. Good fishing.”

“You’re going for thirty, aren’t you?”

“Maybe; it mostly depends on my passing the Physical Fitness Tests since I’m getting a little osteoarthritis in my knees. I’d like to make E-9 and then call it quits.”

“Marion is pestering me to retire with twenty.”

“What do you want to do Jack?”

“Hang around long enough to scratch a few itches. I’m on the list for Master Sergeant. E-8 retirement pay is better than E-7.”

"I'll probably have to reenlist to make E-9. Anyway, thanks for the heads up on the McMillan rifle. Might be nice to round out my military collection."

"You collect firearms?"

"I got into Single Action Shooting for a while and have a complete collection. After I lost interest in that, I started building a military collection. My only hole there is a fifty caliber of the legal firearms. You, better than most, should know how they are about non-expendables."

"So true; but you'd be surprised how many non-expendables turn up missing. That's especially true during combat and when the Army goes to a new system. I have several new in the box M-79s. You'd be surprised what I could let one of those go for."

"What?"

"A six bottle case of JD Single Barrel. That's around \$300. Of course you have to send it home or something."

"Hmm, maybe my brother could store it for me. What about the expendables?"

"You know how they're packed... so many bandoleers per can? Expendables are easier so let's say three bottles per can."

"You drink a lot?"

"Oh hell no... I'm just building up a lifetime supply. The price sure won't go down."

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That's how I started making an investment in my future. Once Jack made Master Sergeant, he served out his enlistment and retired. He and his wife, Marion, bought a piece of property on Bull Shoals Lake... on the Missouri side. My brother refused to store *anything dangerous* and I talked my brother-in-law into storing the hand grenades and 40mm grenades.

Jack had come through with the MUNS although there had been a stink when the shipment came up four short. He explained that the MUNS had a MSRP of nearly \$11,000 each and even with GSA pricing, the loss was significant enough to cause an investigation. My two cost me \$5,000 each... for the risk involved.

Shortly after my next reenlistment, I was promoted to E-9. Clinton had been semi-popular back home as Governor; but, once in the White House, he became a royal pain in the ass. On top of that, my knees were really getting bad so that became my final enlistment. I retired with twenty-eight years in during 2000 and settled for 70%.

I'd rented a large lock box in Mountain Home and moved my precious metals there every time I took a leave. I'd actually accumulated quite a bit between 1986 and 2000. All of my *special items* were stored in a metal shed on my sister and brother-in-law's farm well away from the other buildings.

While I'd set aside fifteen grand for the Tac-50 and accessories, I needed a place to live and decided to get a place near Flippin giving me quick access to Bull Shoals Lake. Being a cheapskate for almost twenty-five years paid off; I paid cash for the home I bought. And, let me tell you, it was a bargain.

The previous owner had died and his widow wanted to move back to Missouri to be near her family. The realtor told me that the guy was a *Crackpot Survivalist* and it had never set well with his wife. She set the price on the home slightly below market but the price was firm. I'd never really given much consideration, up until then, about prepping but the tour of the home pointed me in a new direction.

She'd taken his firearms, radios and LTS foods, but much of what he had couldn't be moved easily and came with the house. It included an underground shelter built of reinforced concrete with a separate generator room containing a 15kw Onan propane generator. The buried propane tank held 10,000-gallons but was only about half full.

"No dicker room here is there?"

"I'm afraid not. However, the house is priced below market and doesn't take any of the bonus items into consideration. I didn't show it to you, but there is a separate armory off the tunnel to the generator room. That was the steel door you saw."

"Can I see it?"

"Sure."

"My God, how big is this room?"

"Twelve foot square."

"I'll take it."

"Have you arranged financing?"

"I'll pay cash."

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 2

“You’re kidding?”

“Nope. Where do I sign?”

“Let’s get back to the office and fill out the papers.”

“How long for it to close?”

“On a cash purchase? A few days.”

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A few days later, I ran into Jack fishing on the lake.

“Hey Jack, live around here?”

“Missouri side.”

“Small world.”

“Sure is. Where are you, Mountain Home?”

“Rural Flippin, not that far from the lake. I just bought a home and I am waiting for the escrow to close.”

“GI Bill?”

“Paid cash; sometimes being a cheapskate pays off.”

“New boat?”

“It’s new to me. Ranger built it in ’95. Fifty horse Mercury and a trolling motor.”

“Get the Tac-50?”

“That’s next on my list. Say, do you know anything about survivalism or prepping?”

“Some. Thinking about building a shelter?”

“Home came with a 1,200ft² shelter accessed from the basement plus a 12 foot square armory and separate generator room. The generator is an Onan 15kw propane fueled unit. Guy had a half full 10,000-gallon tank.”

“Must have been a *crackpot*... the Cold War ended in ’91.”

“I think maybe his shelter predates the end of the Cold War.”

“Be ok if I check it out sometime? I won’t blab about it.”

“What do you mean?”

“People who are into preparedness tend to hold their cards close to their vest. That keeps them from ending up with half the town on their doorstep if something goes down. Don’t you remember that old *Twilight Zone* episode *The Shelter*?”

“I must have missed it.”

“Next time a cable channel has a *Twilight Zone* marathon, try to catch it. Anyway I got my Tac-50 with the night vision rail, a total of 10 magazines and some Hornady A-MAX Match ammo. Let me know when you get yours and I’ll sell you half of my supply of Mk 211 MP. Only thing I can’t get is a suppressor because of Missouri law. I’d settle for the Elite Iron suppressor that McMillan sells and not worry about getting one of those Jet titanium suppressors that Mike’s Guns in Texas builds.”

“If I could get you one, what would it be worth?”

“Ten cans of Mk 211.”

“Set them back. Can I get your phone number?”

“Sure, it’s 417-555-9243.”

“I’ll call when I get your can. Figure six to nine months. I’ll invite you and Marion up for a house warming as soon as I get settled in.”

“Sounds good. Looks like I’d better call it a day.”

“I’ll call when I get a phone Jack.”

“Ok David, I look forward to it.”

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In order to get the Tac-50 with the suppressor, I had to go through a class 3 dealer. I filled out all the paperwork, got the fingerprints and law enforcement approval. I paid for everything except the suppressor and was told 45 days wait on the rifle and accessories if I wanted the new model.

While I waited on the rifle, escrow closed and I spent a fair amount of time furniture shopping. I went with a king suite for the master bedroom and queen suite for the guest

bedroom. All of the furniture was oak and came in sets or was carefully matched. The only exception was the small Formica table for the breakfast nook with two chairs. The dining room table with both leaves in measured 96" and sat 8 people. A buffet table graced one wall and a china cabinet the other wall. I installed an oak framed mirror over the fireplace in the living room, a leather sofa with end tables, a pair of leather recliners with a single table and table lamp. The final two pieces of furniture in the living room were a pair of leather occasional chairs.

The basement had a propane furnace sitting next to a wood/coal burning furnace with the ducting routed to the propane furnace. The concrete block basement had a coal room with outside access. The coal stoker was sitting in the empty coal room. At the other end of the basement was a room constructed using car siding and the shelves indicated it was a fruit cellar. The hot water heater was also propane, a 50 gallon unit.

Both bedrooms had attached baths with separate tub and shower and what I first thought was a linen closet in the hall turned out to be half bath/powder room. The home dated from the 1950s but was larger than the typical '50s home, even sporting a walk in pantry. It was a single story with approximately 2,160ft². It also had a central air update added later; probably when the propane furnace was installed.

"Hello?"

"This is David Burns, is Jack there?"

"I'm sorry, Jack is fishing."

"You're Marion, right?"

"That's correct."

"I wanted to invite Jack and you over this coming Saturday for a housewarming. The only other guests will be my brother and his family and my sister and her family. There are two picnic tables so we should have enough room. If the weather doesn't cooperate, we can move inside."

"Thank you David. Jack mentioned a housewarming and I'll have him call you. I have your number on the caller ID. Can we bring anything?"

"Just your appetites."

"Jack will call back when he gets in."

"Thank you. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

I'd never met Marion; I wasn't really a social animal, if that's the right term. Hell, I could count the number of dates I'd had during my 28 years by the number of times I'd come home on leave. And every time it was the same woman, Joanne Cummings.

Joanne was from Mountain Home and taught High School Math. She had a Master's degree from the Arkansas State University, Jonesboro and the appropriate teaching credentials. While I had no reason to doubt her, I found it surprising when she said I was the only person she'd ever dated. She and I were steadies our junior and senior years. I went into the Army and she went to college.

I'd learned, quite by accident, that while in college she and a girlfriend went riding and she'd been thrown and trampled by the horse, damaging her uterus. As a result, the doctors had been forced to perform a full hysterectomy. I suspected that's why she'd never married.

"Joanne, David Burns. How are you this evening?"

"I'm fine thank you. Are you home on leave?"

"No, I retired with twenty-eight years in."

"So you're home for good?"

"Yes. I bought a house near Flippin and am having a housewarming this coming Saturday. I'm calling to invite you."

"I'd love to come. I'm not very good with directions; could I meet you at the Flippin Wal-Mart early and follow you home?"

"I'll meet you there."

"Bye..."

"Goodbye."

"Hello?"

"David, Jack. We accept, what time Saturday?"

"Around two?"

"How about we cross the lake by boat and you pick us up at the landing?"

"Can you take the south finger and find Marion County 8064?"

"Uh... yeah, got it."

“You sure?”

“Positive. Say, you didn’t tell me; did you make E-9?”

“Yep, first promotion cycle after I reenlisted the last time.”

“It’s just going to be us and you and your family, right?”

“I have a date.”

“You’re kidding. I thought you didn’t date.”

“I’ve been dating the same woman since we were juniors in High School.”

“Uh... don’t you think it’s about the time you got off the dime? She’s single, right? I mean I can’t see you dating a married woman.”

“No, she’s single and I’m the only guy she’s dated in thirty years.”

“I won’t ask.”

“Good, I wouldn’t answer either way.”

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The next day I got a new 5 burner propane stove, 27ft³ refrigerator and 25ft³ chest freezer for delivery the following day. I returned to Flippin and went shopping for small appliances at Wal-Mart. I bought two of most things; for example a stovetop percolator and a Bunn drip coffee maker, electric and hand operated can openers, a four slot toaster and so forth. As for groceries, what I couldn’t get at the Wal-Mart Supercenter, I got at Sanders and Son Grocery, which wasn’t much.

Even with the chunk of money I dropped at the two grocery stores, the pantry was pretty bare. I bought two services of eight in Stoneware and the same in flatware and glassware. I ran one set through the dishwasher at a time and while it was washing, lined the shelves with shelf paper. Once the first load was done and cooled, I put it away on the shelves and in the drawers and loaded the second half. While that load was running, I stocked the pantry and made a list of what I’d overlooked and what I needed to stock the refrigerator the next day. At least I could make a pot of coffee now.

Speaking of overlooking things, I called the appliance store back and ordered a washer and propane dryer and told them I’d be by in a bit to pay for them.

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 3

The beds came with 2 sets of sheets and pillowcases each, but no mattress pads, bed covers or pillows. Rather than chance Wal-Mart having what I was looking for, I drove back to Mountain Home. I paid for the washer, dryer and installation kit and headed to my next destination to get the missing bedware.

On my way home, I hit the Supercenter again and filled those holes. Joanne liked Bigelow Earl Grey tea so I bought 20 count boxes of 7 Bigelow varieties including Earl Grey, Darjeeling, English Breakfast, English Teatime, Constant Comment, Green Tea and Chamomile, extra cans of Folgers, several bundles of Charmin, 4 hand soap dispensers and a half-gallon refill bottle. I added dryer sheets, several complete sets of wash cloths, hand towels, bath towels and bath sheets, dishwasher and clothes washer detergent and color safe dry bleach. I grabbed a bundle of kitchen towels and a package of sponges. Finally, I bought the most important item, cookware, getting Kitchen Craft by Wear Ever and Silverstone by Kitchen Aide.

After I had everything put away, I balanced my MMA and bank checkbooks. I was still in good shape and was looking forward to the Saturday, September 8, 2001 housewarming. I loaded the cookware in the dishwasher and started it. Too tired to go back to Flip-pin and get dinner, I opened an MRE and had it with the last of the coffee. I showered and crawled in bed.

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My retirement was 70% of \$4,060.80 per month or \$2,842.56 per month. My MMA wasn't earning quite what it did before, especially after paying cash for the house. So, if I intended to support myself to the standard I expected, I had to clear another \$1,200 per month, minimum, and more likely \$1,800 or more. I needed something that paid \$450 per week clear.

After the appliances were delivered and installed, I headed west to Yellville to talk with someone in the Marion County Sheriff's Department. I wanted a recommendation on the best place to get armed guard training and get the lowdown on concealed carry. I'd been home long enough to apply for the state issued concealed carry permit and I was advised to check with the Highway Patrol about both the CCW and training because training was required to get the CCW. They also licensed Security Guards. It was suggested that I drive over to Harrison and talk to the Patrol Office. I drove to Mountain Home (Baxter County) to confirm that.

I was just climbing into my pickup when I heard "Hello stranger."

"Hi yourself. You here to pay a ticket?"

"No you do that at the Court House, remember?"

“You’re a sight for sore eyes.”

“Well, since you’re here, why don’t you follow me home and I’ll get an overnight bag.”

“Sounds like a plan to me. We can stop by Wal-Mart on the way and pick up some refrigerator items and the steaks I ordered for tomorrow.”

“Will they be ready?”

“I was going to pick them up on the way home along with hot dogs, hamburgers, buns, back ribs and chickens.”

“Who all is coming?”

“Bob and his family, Jill and her family plus Jack and Marion Brown. I know Jack from the Army and they live across the lake in Missouri.”

“Jack originally from Missouri?”

“Phoenix, Arizona.”

“What about his wife?”

“I don’t have a clue. I’ve never actually met her.”

“Well, follow me.”

I’d been to Joanne’s apartment so many times that unless she moved, it wouldn’t be a problem. She’s 5’9 to my 6’ with an above average figure and waist length Brunette hair. She might go 125 to my 165 and was fairly trim. Of course her being slender emphasized her 34C-22-33 profile. I waited in my truck and she couldn’t have been in the apartment long enough to pack an overnight bag. But, she was back in minutes and had changed into a western style shirt cut to emphasize her figure, skin tight blue jeans and cowboy boots. She set her suitcase in the backseat and climbed in beside me.

“I missed you.”

“I missed you too.”

“Are you finally ready to settle down?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’ve been waiting almost 30 years to say yes. Since you bought a home, I assume you’re home to stay.”

“Yes, Joanne, I’m home to stay. Church wedding or see the judge?”

“See the judge on Monday over lunch hour.”

“Yeah, that sounds romantic.”

“We’ve been romancing each other for almost 30 years. We have everything in our relationship except for the rings and ceremony. We can move my things over the next couple of weeks.”

“Do you plan to keep working?”

“Is your Army retirement pay enough to keep you going?”

“As a matter of fact, no. I was checking out a CCW and Security Guard license with the Baxter County Sheriff. He basically told me the same as the Marion County Sheriff; see the State Patrol in Harrison.”

“Out of the frying pan and into the fire, huh?”

“There can’t be that much trouble in this area of the state.”

“It’s not the same as it was when we were in High School. Ten years ago, you were in Saudi Arabia getting ready to liberate Kuwait.”

“That was accomplished with air power and armor.”

“I know; we watched Ol’ Stormin’ Norman’s briefings on TV. You have to give him credit, he had a great PR man or woman producing those press briefings. Have you ever wondered what happened to the luckiest man in Iraq?”

“He beat the bomb. We’re here. Let’s both grab a cart.”

“David Burns to pick up an order. Joanne, why don’t you grab a couple of packages of the preformed extra lean quarter pound burgers, a couple packs of hot dogs and however many buns we’ll need.”

“How many chickens?”

“Get a bag of breast quarters and one of leg quarters. I’ll get the steaks and ribs.”

“You need barbeque sauce?”

“KC Masterpiece; forgot that too, and baking potatoes and pre-mixed lettuce salads.”

“Did you get dressings?”

“I get an F in planning; get an assortment but include Ranch, Thousand Island and French.”

While I waited for the butcher to get my order I checked out the meat case. They had two very nice filets and precooked jumbo shrimp.”

“Will there be anything else?”

“Those two filets and a pound of the jumbo shrimp.”

“There is shrimp sauce on the shelf on the front of the case.”

I grabbed 3 bottles of Heinz Shrimp Cocktail Sauce and added them to the cart; one for the shrimp and two for the pantry. When Joanne returned, she'd added dinner rolls, boiling potatoes, celery, green pepper, green onions, grated cheese, sliced black olives, pimentos and a huge bag of large elbow macaroni. Not only did she have baking potatoes, she had french fries, onions, two 18 count trays of jumbo eggs, celery seed, salt, pepper and two boxes of Earl Grey.

“Are you planning on doing salads?”

“Sure, if you have stainless mixing bowls.”

“I don't.”

“I'll get two sets. Surf and turf for dinner?”

“Shrimp cocktail, filet and baked.”

“How many shrimp did you get?”

“One pound.”

“Get two more pounds of the jumbo and I'll grab another bag of dinner rolls and Caesar Salad makings.”

“I'll follow you this time.”

“I'll be in the produce section.”

With all of the meat, this stop was going to dent my wallet. When we met up in the produce section, she was adding prepared carrots, more green onions and radishes. She already had the Romaine lettuce, croutons, grated Parmesan cheese, two bulbs of garlic, olive oil and a lemon. Our last stop was for the stainless mixing bowl sets. She got

two sets plus two of the extra-large bowls use to make large batches of salads or to mix bread dough.

“Are we ready?”

“A bottle of Merlot might be nice.”

“Do you have any liquor?”

“No.”

“Isn’t Marion County dry?”

“Damn. I’ll get the booze while you’re working on the salads tomorrow morning. The only thing I have to drink is a six pack of Silver Bullets.”

“Grab a twelve pack of squirt.”

“Ok if I get a twelve pack of Dr. Pepper and one of A&W for the kids?”

“Good idea. What about beer?”

“Recommendation?”

“Millers Genuine Draft and you better get a full case of long necks tomorrow if they have them.”

“You’d better come with me, my cart is filling up.”

“I’ll grab another cart. You can push one and pull the other.”

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Fortunately I had enough cash left to cover everything.

“When we get home, I’ll scrub two baking potatoes and get them started. I think I’ll do the potatoes for the potato salad while I’m at it. That will let me whip up the potato salad quickly in the morning and start on the macaroni salad. Maybe you can help, that’s a lot of slicing and dicing.”

“Wait, I didn’t buy a set of kitchen cutlery. I’ll grab one while you start getting checked out. Here’s my MMA debit card. The pin number is the last four digits of your SSN. I’ll grab a cutting board while I’m at it.”

“It appears that it’s a good thing we stopped tonight.”

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 4

“Yep.”

“Considering the meal, maybe a Coors Light would be better.”

“The appliances were delivered and installed this the morning so I guess we’d better get some ice cubes and 2 blocks of ice.”

“Does it have an icemaker?”

“It does.”

“Good. We can save up ice cubes for the next time.”

“What next time?”

“We’ll have to hold a wedding reception next weekend. Keep that in mind tomorrow when you go to Mountain Home for the booze.”

“We have to get rings.”

“And we need to apply for a license. We’d better move the judge to next Friday.”

“There’s no blood test required and no waiting period after the license is issued. It costs \$35 and is good for sixty days. Both parties must appear before the County Clerk to apply for the license. We can apply for license on your lunch break on Monday, get the rings after school lets out and get married on the Tuesday, the eleventh.”

“Witnesses?”

“Will Bob and Jill be ok?”

“How about your Army friend and his wife?”

“I’ll ask him tomorrow afternoon.”

“Say, how come you knew all the particulars about the marriage laws?”

“I was going to propose tomorrow morning.”

“Really?”

“Yes, you just beat me to it.”

“Good, now I don’t feel like I pushed you into getting married.”

“Why do you think I spent the better part of twenty-five years accumulating money? Assuming you accepted, I wanted to provide for you in the manner you deserved. Jack was ragging me when I told him that I only dated one woman in my entire life. He also started asking some particulars that I refused to respond to either way. And, I still won't except to say you were worth the wait.”

“I'm glad that you neither confirmed nor denied a discussion of our relationship.”

“I would have asked a long time ago except I saw how hard it was on military wives. And, I'm very, very happy that you waited for me.”

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“The potato salad potatoes are done. I think I'll start the macaroni so that's ready too. Could you check the baking potatoes?”

“Sure. Hmm... still hard as a rock.”

“Ok, rinse this pan after I set the potatoes in a bowl to cool. How are you going to fix the filets?”

“On the gas grill; I'll set them out to warm a little and start the grill in a bit. Meanwhile, I'll start the shrimp cocktail”

“I'll do the salads while you do the shrimp cocktails.”

“I've got to tell you, Joanne; if this is any example of how well we mesh, I believe we have a bright future ahead of us.”

Little did we know that our plans for Tuesday would be interrupted in a manner no one in American expected. On Tuesday the US would experience the greatest act of terrorism in the county's history. The 1993 attack on the World Trade Center and the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building would pale in comparison. All because a rich Saudi Arabian was offended by the presence of American military forces being stationed in his country over the course of the Gulf War.

The meal was excellent and after, we loaded the dishwasher and started it. While Joanne showered, I finished putting up the miscellaneous items in the pantry and moved the ice from the freezer in the refrigerator to the basement 25ft³ chest freezer. I made a note to pick up two large Igloo coolers on my return trip from Mountain Home. The macaroni and potatoes were in covered bowls in the new refrigerator.

I showered and shaved and crawled into bed with my bride-to-be. She was sleeping soundly and I let her sleep. We had the remainder of our lives before us. We had an in-

timate relationship beginning when she returned to Mountain Home to begin teaching math at the High School.

After a breakfast of pancakes and bacon, I was ready to head for Mountain Home while Joanne started on the salads.

“Where is the mayonnaise?”

“Oops. I hurry as fast as possible and stop by Wal-Mart on the way home. Will six quarts be enough?”

“Better get eight just in case and another tray of Jumbo eggs. I think I’ll do a plate or two of deviled eggs. Here is a list of what we’ll need.”

As I typically did, I got a bit carried away in Mountain Home, ending up with a full case of Merlot and two mixed cases of hard liquor which I topped off with a case of Coors and two cases of MGD. I added an assortment of things like sweet and dry vermouth, Grand Marnier for Margaritas, a bottle of Drambuie for Rusty Nails, stemmed cherries and bitters (Manhattans), king sized stuffed olives (Martinis), cocktail onions (Gibson) and Rose water (Gimlets). I also picked up a bartender’s guide.

At Wal-Mart I got everything on her list plus several bottles of mixes like Collins mix, Club Soda, Ginger Ale, Tonic water, regular and diet Pepsi, regular and diet Coke, and a bag of limes. I was home just at the time she was beginning to finish the macaroni salad. The potato salad had the onions, diced eggs, celery seed and only need the Mayo to finish it too. While she finished the salads, I asked how many of the 30 hard-boiled eggs she’d used and she said a dozen. She said she’d boiled the other six and the remaining 24 eggs should be enough.

“I’ve already started a list of things we’re low on or don’t have, like bacon and sausage. About what I said last night about you becoming a Security Guard... I was out of line. David, you have to do whatever you want to do. I’ll worry, but no more than you’ll worry about my daily commute. The road to Mountain Home isn’t a stretch of interstate; it’s a section of two lane Ozark mountain highway.”

“I got a bit carried away at the liquor store Joanne. I bought enough to stock a small home bar. As far as being a licensed Security Guard goes, it was just a thought. I think I’ll get the training, but I’m not sure I’ll look for an armed guard job. I’m fairly sure that the Super Center probably has store security to protect against shoplifting. Those people probably aren’t armed.”

“Maybe waiting thirty years wasn’t such a bad idea; all the rough edges are gone. And, it’s past time we stopped meeting the way we were. You have no idea how many times I wanted to ask you to marry me. But, that wouldn’t have been proper for a well raised southern lady.”

"I understand and hope you understand why I didn't ask before. We saw *We Were Soldiers*, remember? Hal Moore's wife was responsible for changing the method of notifying next of kin. As long as I was in the *frying pan* as you put it, I couldn't do that to you."

"Couldn't or wouldn't?"

"It's the same difference as far as I am concerned. I thought I was in love with you when we started dating our junior year and was certain our senior year. I spent a lot of time during my first hitch thinking about asking you to marry me. When I reenlisted something changed and I knew I could never ask before I got out. If I'd gotten out in '91, I'd never have seen combat, such as it was, in Desert Storm."

"Pull the potato salad out and I get the macaroni salad chilling. Do you have something to ice down the soft drinks and beer?"

"Yes, I picked up two 105 quart coolers."

"Why don't you get the drinks chilling while I finish this salad? I only took 8 chicken quarters out to thaw, is that enough?"

"I suspect we'll have leftovers."

"Why don't you only cook enough to serve those who want chicken?"

"Good idea. I only bought two racks of back ribs. I think when the adults see the steaks; most of them will want steaks."

"We could do the same with the ribs as the chickens."

"We'll do it that way. The five kids will probably want hamburgers and hot dogs."

"Did you get them steaks just in case? Has anyone besides me seen your new home?"

"I got everyone a steak and no one besides you has seen the home. Why?"

"It will be interesting to see what they come up with a housewarming gift."

"Did you get something?"

"Yes, me."

"Nobody can top that."

"Thank you. Can you get the refrigerator door?"

"Sure, what's next?"

“Rinse the pre-packaged lettuce salads and put those back in the refrigerator. Then we can clean up and change. I have no intention of wearing these jeans and this blouse until I know everyone a little better.”

“Thank you. What you have on is a real attention getter.”

“I know; why do you think I wore it? Sometimes clothes enhance rather than hide. Do you have jeans, western cut shirts and boots?”

“I’ve had them for years, dating back to my Single Action Shooting hobby.”

“Do you still do that?”

“No, I lost interest. I did keep the firearms. Then I got involved in collecting military style firearms. I bought Para Ordnance handguns, a Springfield Armory Super Match rifle and a Mossberg Marine Corps 590A1 shotgun. I’m waiting for the final rifle to arrive, a McMillan Tac-50.”

“Fifty caliber?”

“Yes it is. Bolt action, five round magazines, Nightforce 12-42x56mm NXS mil dot scope and the McCann Night Vision Rail to hold my Magnum Universal Night Sight. Jack has some special military only match ammo and I still have to order the Hornady 750 grain A-MAX Match.”

“Expensive?”

“Oh yeah. Before we get cleaned up, let me give you the full tour of our home.”

“I’d like that.”

“Let’s start in the basement.”

“Ok.”

After we went downstairs, her first comment was “Two furnaces?”

“The original was the wood/coal furnace. There is a coal stoker in the coal room behind that concrete block wall. On the other end is what appears to be a fruit cellar. That hot water heat is propane, 50 gallons, and your new washer and dryer are over there. The main thing I wanted to show you was what is behind that blast door in the wall.”

“Blast door?”

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 5

“According to the realtor, the previous owner was a *Crackpot Survivalist*. To be honest, that’s what sold me on the place.”

“Really? Are you into that too?”

“Not yet, but I think we’ll equip the shelter for full use. Lots of tornados come through here. You can see the 4 in 1 kitchen. In the far left corner is a $\frac{3}{4}$ bath. On this wall are three bedrooms that I think are a master bedroom and male and female dorms. His widow stripped the place of anything easily moved and left the rest. Let’s go down the tunnel on the other side of that door over there.”

“What does it lead to?”

“The generator room and the armory.”

“Which comes first?”

“The armory. Here look.”

“I see you have a few things already.”

“The firearms I mentioned and my accumulated ammo.”

“What are those canisters?”

“Forty millimeter grenades. The other boxes with the government markings are various hand grenades.”

“Does the door have a good lock?”

“It has a high security lock with a tamper plate.”

“Ok, we’ll move my rifle down here.”

“The AC-556?”

“Yes, I carry the PPK. My CCW is up for renewal anyway so I can put in the name change changing Cummings to Burns.”

“How do you get away with having a firearm on school grounds?”

“What they don’t know won’t hurt me. I leave it locked in the glove compartment.”

“Did you ever solve the accuracy problem with the Mini?”

“I had a gunsmith install a 20” target barrel. That eliminated most of the heat problem. It added some weight, but it was worth it. It’s actually accurate out to 400 meters. Apparently Ruger stopped making the AC-556. I’m glad I got the folding stock because it makes for a relatively compact package. But the heavier barrel offsets the weight.”

“This is the generator room. That’s an Onan 15kw propane generator. She left the extra filters but took the oil and shelves. There is a 10,000-gallon propane tank buried that is about half full.”

“Where is the storeroom?”

“They must have stored the food on shelves in the shelter.”

“How difficult would it be to add a storeroom?”

“Not that bad. We could excavate down to the armory and extend a block wall to the back wall of the generator room, turn a corner and extend the wall to the generator room. That would be a lot of storage.”

“You’re right. It would store a lifetime supply for 15 people. That would include everyone coming today and my parents.”

“It might be a little tight, but not too tight. It would allow 80ft² per person. I doubt that the others would come for a tornado watch and they wouldn’t have time if there was a tornado warning.”

“I agree, but you’re thinking beyond that, aren’t you?”

“You know me too well.”

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After we cleaned up and changed, it was time to walk down to the lake on Marion County 8064. We arrived just as Jack was locking the boat to a tree with a cable and padlock. He went back to the boat and began covering the part still in the water with a camouflage tarp. Marion was carrying a package and he had an overnight bag.

“I wasn’t sure what time the celebration would end and we brought a change of clothes, just in case. David Burns meet my wife Marion Brown; Marion, David Burns.”

“Joanne Cummings, I’d like to introduce you to Jack and Marion Brown.”

We started walking back to the house and Jack leaned over and whispered, “Man, can you pick ‘em.”

"We're getting married at noon on Tuesday and Joanne suggested that Marion and you be our witnesses."

"We'd be honored, thank you."

"We're here."

"Why did you buy a boat and two motors? You can walk to the lake and fish from the shore."

"That's true but it would be a shame to live this close to a very large lake and not have a boat."

"When did you propose?"

"I didn't."

"She proposed?"

"No, she sort of gave me an ultimatum. So we discussed it and agreed to get married this week before a judge. I had planned to propose this morning anyway."

"You two are a little too old to start a family, aren't you?"

"Joanne was thrown and trampled by a horse while she was in college at ASU, Jonesboro. She can't have any children. We've been seeing each other since High School."

"What does she do?"

"She teaches Math at Mountain View High School."

"I sometimes wish I hadn't retired at E-8 with twenty-four. It would have made a big difference if I'd have gone for thirty and made E-9."

"I know what you mean. Without Joanne's income I'd have had to take a job. I don't envy you trying to make it on only a military pension."

"We couldn't do it if we had the kid at home. He is working his way through college in Phoenix and living with his grandparents. He works part time and contributes for some of the groceries. Anyway, we couldn't decide what to get you for a house warming gift and I decided to share a couple of bottles of my lifetime supply. There is two fifths of the Single Barrel in the sack Marion is carrying. What do you have on ice?"

"You'll find MGD and Coors Light in the cooler on the left and assorted soft drinks in the cooler on the right."

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“Marion, do you work or are you a homemaker?”

“More like a housekeeper. I dust on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Mondays are wash days. On Wednesday I mop the floor and vacuum and on Friday I work on my quilt. Sunday morning is church and Jack either goes to the firing range or fishing during the afternoon. What about you?”

“I teach Math at Mountain View High School. David and I are getting married on Tuesday the eleventh and I’m certain he has asked Jack if you and he would be our witnesses. It will just be before a judge on my lunch hour. We’ll have a reception here next Saturday the fifteenth. We’re going to get the license on Monday at lunch and the rings Monday evening.”

“Have you known David for a long time?”

“Would you believe me that we’ve only dated each other since we were juniors in High School? Most of the time, David would take leave two or three times a year and come back home so we could spend time with each other. We’ve been very close.”

“And you’ve never dated anyone else?”

“Hard to believe isn’t it? David isn’t very outgoing and I believe him when he says he never dated either.”

“I can believe that, I hadn’t met him before today. Jack said he mostly went to the movies, worked out some at the body building gym and seemed to change hobbies from time to time.”

“That’s David. Would you like a tour of our home?”

“Sure. Is there a bathroom handy?”

“The powder room is the first door on your right down the hallway.”

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By three, everyone had arrived and introductions made where necessary. I took everyone’s orders for the barbeque and was only wrong in one case. Bob’s oldest child, Mark, wanted a chicken breast, hamburger and however many hot dogs he could eat. Because we had both potato salad and macaroni salad available, everyone passed on a baked potato but some indicated that a lettuce salad might be a good start for the meal.

Jill didn’t drink, but her husband, Hal, took a Coors. Neither Bob nor Mary drank and they settled for Cokes, one Classic and one diet. The kids helped themselves to what-

ever was available in the soft drink cooler. Being a *Southern* state meant that we had both Coke and Pepsi, regular and diet. There was also Squirt, Dr. Pepper, Root Beer and Seven-Up.

As the news of our pending wedding made the rounds, we were both battered with comments about having waited so long and about not having a church wedding. One of the most frequent comments heard from my brother and sister and their spouses was, "It's about time."

"Bob, I can handle the hamburgers, hot dogs and chickens, but would you do the steaks?"

"You can't cook them?"

"I can cook them but I'm sure everyone would prefer their steak to be cooked a particular level of doneness. I can't do that, all I know how to do is medium on a charcoal grill."

"Fire up the grill and start that piece of chicken, it will take the longest. You might as well let the hamburgers and hot dogs warm while the steaks warm."

"Ok, the chicken has been sitting on the counter since I took everyone orders. I'll set out the rest and bring the chicken. Could you light the grill? I haven't used it since I moved in."

"It's not yours?"

"It came with house. It's plumbed into the big propane tank."

"What big propane tank? I don't see a propane tank."

"It's buried and it's rather large, 10,000-gallons. It's about half full."

"Why would you need that large of a tank?"

"It principally powers the backup generator and supplies the dryer, hot water heater, furnace and kitchen stove."

"After we eat, you can count on giving all of us a tour."

"Sure."

Meanwhile, Joanne brought out the chicken, hot dogs, hamburgers, steaks and buns with Jill and Marion helping. They continued hauling as I started the chicken breast cooking. There was the relish tray, the dinner rolls, butter, and the three salads and various dressings plus condiments. She also brought out two bottles of Merlot.

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 6

After we finished dinner, those that were interested were given a tour of the home and facilities including the shelter. I pointed out that they'd better not mention the shelter to anyone.

“So now you're a survivalist?”

“No, I'm not a survivalist. Don't forget that terrorists tried to bring down the World Trade Center in '93 and McVey bombed the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in '95. We also had those US embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya in '98. The Cold War may be over, but we have more nuclear powers now, eight.”

“Eight?”

“The US, Great Britain, France, Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Israel.”

“Israel?”

“Their official policy is nuclear ambiguity, but they have them and you can take that to the bank.”

“Senator Vernon Trent in *Marked for Death*?”

“Right character but the movie was *Hard to Kill*. *Marked for Death* was the Haitian twins' movie.”

“How do you keep the movies straight?”

“I watched them more than once and kept a diary.”

“You're kidding me.”

“Lots of empty hours in twenty-eight years.”

“You two should have gotten married years ago.”

“Joanne had a career and I had a career and they weren't compatible.”

“Says who?”

“Me.”

“Is that true Joanne?”

"It's more true than not. It would have been difficult to maintain a teaching career being married to a man that moved from post to post at the convenience of the Army. I will say that we've been in love since we were seniors in High School and I'm certain David would agree with me on that. So, I waited until he came home to stay and snatched him before any other woman could get their hands on him. Our getting married was a mutual decision."

"When did you find out he was back?"

"When he called to invite me to the housewarming."

"Uh-huh. And when did you get engaged?"

"Yesterday."

"And where did you stay last night?"

"Not that it's any of your business, but I stayed here."

"In the guest room?"

"No. But for your information, we did not have sex. End of subject!"

"What do you have to say for yourself David?"

"Mind your own damn business Bob. She's right; we've been in love since High School. I thought about asking Joanne to marry me more than once. However Jack can tell you how hard it was on the married guys with families or who was married to a woman with a career."

"That's right Bob. We had one child, a son, Jason. Marion was a stay at home mother, but every time I got transferred, we had to deal with our son's schooling. We moved six or seven times over the twenty-four years. I may not show it as often as I should, but she was the one who kept the family as comfortable as possible. Now, she's busy every day except Sunday. She keeps the cleanest home I have ever lived in. She could teach Emeril a thing or two about cooking too. To top it off, she manages our income and expenses and I don't see how she can do what she does. We'd have been better off financially if I'd stayed another hitch. She wanted me to retire so I did. I can pick 'em every bit as well as David."

I glanced at Joanne and she had her eyes glued on Marion who was standing there with her chin on the floor and an amazed look on her face. Maybe Jack was right and he didn't show his appreciation often enough, but he'd finally shown it in the most public manner possible. She turned quickly and Joanne handed her a Kleenex. There could be no doubt that Jack's public acknowledgement of Marion's role in the family had moved her very deeply.

Marion was good looking but no raving beauty like Joanne was; nor did she have as generous figure. Bob cleared his throat and we returned to clear the picnic table and put away the leftover salads, dressings and the like. I offered to do the dishes but Joanne just smiled and said I really should break out some glasses and sample Jack and Marion's housewarming gift.

"Jack gave me some Jack Daniels Single Barrel as a house warming gift. It's rather special, how about we have a sample?"

"You know David I think I may just give that a try. Sure, why not?"

"Hal?"

"Sure."

"I'll be right back."

"What do you need?"

"A bowl for ice."

"Here."

"Thanks. I need four glasses too, but I'll get those. Do we have a tray?"

"No we don't. I'll take the four glasses out for you."

I dumped a partial bag of ice cubes into the bowl and retrieved the Single Barrel from the pantry where I'd decided to keep the liquor. When I returned, I handed the bottle to Jack to open. Once the bottle was open, it was passed around. Jack and I took ours neat and both Hal and Bob had it over ice.

"Swirl it around in the glass a little. Half the pleasure in drinking this stuff is the aroma. It's kind of like cognac in that way, the warmth of your hand releases more of the characteristics of the whiskey. Well, opinions?"

"It's really smooth Jack. It has just the tiniest burn on the tongue and throat but goes down really well."

"Bob?"

"First time I've ever tasted Jack Daniels. How does this compare to their black label and Gentleman Jack?"

"I'd say it has a fuller flavor."

"I like it," Hal said. "What's it run?"

"About fifty a bottle."

"How much does an airline bottle hold?"

"Fifty milliliters."

"That's what, \$3.50 a drink?"

"Yeah, that's about right, if you're talking the fifth price and not the airline price."

"I think I'll stick with that bottle of Jim Beam I've been nursing for a couple of years."

I had to respond to that. "You know, I think maybe I'll see about getting 24 bottles out of the same barrel."

"I didn't know you drank."

"Well, I don't drink a lot, but I'm no teetotaler. I enjoy a good Merlot with a steak and a cold beer on a hot, humid day. I actually bought 2 mixed cases of liquor so we had something on hand for company."

"What's Joanne's favorite drink?"

"A Margarita on the rocks made with Cuervo 1800, Grand Marnier and fresh lime juice in a ratio of 7:4:3."

"Fancy drink."

"That's sure true, but she rarely has more than one and I've never seen her drink more than two."

"Do you have a favorite?"

"I'm not really a bourbon fan unless it's really good bourbon like Maker's Mark. I'd say my favorite cocktail is a Rusty Nail on the rocks made with a good blended scotch like Chivas and Drambuie. Regular 12 or 18 year old Chivas Regal is good enough for me. I don't much care for the single malt scotch."

"Did your rifle come in yet?"

"It should be any day for the rifle Jack. I figure it will be a few months for the suppressor. You know Joanne has a Ruger AC-556 that she had re-barreled with a target barrel. I

was giving some thought to acquiring Surefire suppressors for my Super Match and her rifle. It will go faster once the ATF approves my Elite Iron suppressor for the Tac-50.”

“I knew it! You’re a survivalist.”

“Bob, I have a complete set of single action arms including three Colts, a Winchester in .45 Colt, a Marlin 1895 Cowboy in .45-70 and a reproduction side hammer 12 gauge Coach Gun. Does that make me a Cowboy? I also have the Springfield Armory Super Match, two Para Ordnance .45ACP pistols and Mossberg Marine Corps model 590A1 shotgun. Does that make me a Marine? I think not. What it does make me is a gun collector.”

“No M16 or Beretta M9?”

“They’re totally worthless firearms in my opinion. The M16 is touchy about cleanliness and doesn’t pack much of a punch. The Beretta isn’t as touchy about cleanliness but doesn’t pack much of a punch either. Had to learn to do double and triple taps with the Beretta. It’s more effective with 124gr +P hollow points like Gold Dot or Golden Saber.”

“What do you shoot in your Super Match?”

“M118LR 175gr Match. Joanne’s rifle has a 1:9 barrel and can handle both M193 and M855 ammo. She really doesn’t need anything better than US military surplus. Her primary handgun is a Browning Hi-Power and backup is a PPK in .380.”

“I take it she shoots.”

“Equal to or better than I do, considering what she has for weapons.”

“What exactly is an AC-556?”

“It’s basically a select fire Mini-14 with semi-auto, 3 round burst and full-auto. Hers also has the Ruger folding stock they used on some rifles. It just occurred to me that she has a flashhider on the new barrel. That should make it easy to install a M4FA. I’m almost positive she told me the flashhider was from an M16.”

“Are you expecting a war or something?”

“Not really. A person has to prepare for the worst and hope for the best. Despite serving twenty-eight years in the Army, I never fired a weapon except at the range. I still haven’t figured out how I missed getting sent to Vietnam. The closest I can figure is that they were winding the war down and Nixon’s successful bombing campaign, Operation Linebacker II, is all that prevented me from ending up over there.”

“If I didn’t know better, I’d say you have a negative attitude about the current issue firearms.”

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 7

“By the time I finished AIT, they were pulling troops and equipment. They had most of the major bugs out of the M16 by then and were issuing M16A1s. Of course the major change to the M16 came with the A2. If they had stopped there and hadn’t shortened the barrels, the M16 would have been adequate, but no more.”

“Not all of them. My Super Match is close to the M14 only Match grade or better. The government is still using the M14 rifle. George Patton said that *the M1 Garand was the greatest implement of battle ever devised*. The M14 and the BM59 are both developments of the Garand. The only improvements I want to make are adding a Harris bipod and the suppressor.”

“And the Ruger?”

“Suppressor only.”

“You know David, Dad was worried sick over that possibility. It wasn’t until they pulled the final troops from Saigon that he relaxed a little. He wasn’t really that old when he had the heart attack and died. I truly believe that Mom grieved herself to death over his loss. I’m not saying it was your fault at all, but what a time to volunteer for the Army.”

◦

“I think we’d better be leaving David. There’s still plenty of light to get home before sunset.”

“You’re welcome to stay.”

“Thank you but we’ll see you on Tuesday. Which Court House?”

“Mountain Home at noon sharp.”

“Sports coat and slacks?”

“That’s what I’ll be wearing. Joanne is coming from work on her lunch hour and will probably just wear a dress. And, dinner is on us. Where exactly do you live on the lake?”

“Near Pontiac.”

“North finger?”

“Yep.”

“Marion, Joanne and I appreciate your coming and being our witnesses on Tuesday.”

“We’ll see you on Tuesday.”

“Goodbye,” both responded.

“Well, little brother we’d better get going too. See you next Saturday.”

“We’ll be looking forward to it.”

“Jill, are Hal and you leaving too?”

“Yes, David. The kids need baths and Hal and I have a few chores to do.”

“See you next Saturday?”

“Count on it.”

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“Anything left to clean up or put away?”

“Just the beer and soft drinks. I’m going to freeze one rack of ribs and leave out the thawed chicken, hamburgers and hot dogs. It looks like we have enough leftovers to last the week.”

“Let’s get that done and sit down and relax for a while. We’d better leave out four steaks. I promised Jack Dinner was on us.”

“Just how thick were those steaks?”

“One and one-quarter inches. I skipped the lettuce salad and macaroni salad. I couldn’t have eaten more than that. If it’s ok with you, we can sit down tomorrow and figure out what we’re having next Saturday for the reception. If time permits, we can start figuring out what we need to equip the shelter.”

“We can use my furniture for part of it at least. Now, I want to discuss something else.”

“Go for it.”

“Each time you told me about your savings programs, I followed your lead and did the same. I have an MMA, a good amount in my savings and checking accounts and at least as much gold and silver as you have. Come Tuesday, what’s mine is yours and what’s yours is mine. So, we can make the necessary changes to the shelter and equip it. We can also fill the propane tank and/or add a second if you want. The only things I noticed missing besides the food was the radiation equipment, protective gear and communications equipment.

“I have my general class amateur license and the materials you need to study to get your license. I would suggest getting a crank down, fold over US Towers heavy duty tower with both rotating beam and omni-directional vertical antennas. In addition to the amateur radios, we should add a single side band CB base station and mobile amateur and CB radios to our vehicles. I have a line on an older Dodge Ram with the non-electronic Cummins six cylinder diesel engine. I’m thinking about trading up. You’d better make sure your pickup has a non-electronic engine too.”

“It does have one, I checked last week. We should get some replacement parts like hoses, belts and brake pads and a spare set of mounted tires. We’ll need a supply of oil and the various filters. I’ll do that Monday morning before lunch. I can run the things home after we get the license and be back in time to buy the rings.

“We also need to give some thought to Long Term Storage foods. I’ve heard about that guy in Texas selling reconditioned and certified radiation equipment, but if it’s all the same to you, I’d prefer to buy new equipment from Arrow Tech. They also have a larger assortment of equipment. I can talk to a contractor on Wednesday about adding the storeroom. We can order the other gear from Approved Gas Masks.”

“I noticed that air pump setup; what kind is it?”

“The papers were with them. They’re Safe Cells from American Safe Rooms. It appears that the filters are available individually or as a set. There are two of the Safe Cells but no spare filters.”

“How many sets of replacement filters do you think we should have?”

“Two spare sets for each Safe Cell should be more than adequate. May I ask since you seem to know more about this than I do; are you a closet prepper?”

“I have been for a long time honey. I have an amateur all band Kenwood base station and a Kenwood in my pickup. I also have a Galaxy SSB CB base station, a Cobra 148 GTL SST CB in my pickup and two portable CB radios. I’m not coming into this marriage empty handed and have a large dowry.”

“You did say that you had savings programs and you have gold and silver too?”

“Yes. It’s junk silver and the gold is the four denominations of American Eagles. What’s your lock box number?”

“It’s 104.”

“Mine are numbers 101, 106 and 109.”

“Those are large drawers!”

“Junk silver is bulky. I have a smidgen over \$6,000 face in silver and close to 100 ounces of gold divided among the four denominations, here. How about you?”

“Silver and gold Eagles only. One thousand silver Eagles and about 120 ounces of the gold Eagles.”

“That should keep us in beans for a while. Anyway, we’ll only need mobile radios and antennas for your pickup plus the tower. While you spent twenty-eight years serving our country, I’ve been teaching math for twenty-five years. I think we’re both frugal to the core. Don’t worry about getting a job right away; I rather see you spend your time getting us ready for come what may. I have five one year deluxe LTS food supplies from Walton Feed. I hope you like beans and rice.”

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“Where do you store that much food?”

“I have a small storage locker. The LTS foods only take about 200ft³ including the extras like the oil, my Earl Grey and the Charmin. I didn’t buy a Super Match like you did. Instead, I bought a Loaded and added a Leupold Mk 4 variable power scope. I have a Browning Hi-Power Classic and the same shotgun as you chose. The PPK is my backup.

“My rifle ammo is Hornady 168gr A-MAX except for 1,000 rounds of soft point hunting ammo. My handgun ammo is Speer Lawman and Gold Dot in a 2:1 ratio. I buy surplus M193 and M855, both on strippers, for my AC-556. My shotgun seems to perform well with Brenneke 3” slugs and Remington 3” Express Magnum 00 and No. four buckshot. I also store my ammo in that locker, for the most part.

“The gunsmith installed an M16 flashhider on my new barrel. Do you think we could fit a suppressor on the barrel?”

“We can and will. Hot damn, I love it when a plan comes together; Hannibal Smith on *The A-Team*.”

“So what’s the deal on the fifty caliber suppressor?”

“Jack and I talked about the Tac-50. He already has one but suppressors are illegal in Missouri. He said he would prefer to buy a Jet Titanium suppressor from Mike’s Guns in Texas, but would settle for the Elite Iron suppressor that McMillan sells. So, I went through a class 3 dealer on the rifle and suppressor and included the Elite Iron suppressor. As soon as the tax stamp comes, I’ll buy the Jet suppressor and the Surefire suppressors. Meanwhile I’ll trade the Elite Iron suppressor to Jack for 1,200 rounds of Mk 211 MP anti-personnel/anti-matériel ammo. The suppressor is less than two grand while the ammo runs about \$7.50 a round. It’s a good deal for both of us.”

“Maybe. I think you ought to consider concealing that door to the shelter and we definitely need a second propane tank. Do you think you could replace the present tank with a 30,000-gallon tank? Maybe Jack would be interested in the old tank. We could even give it to them, just to repay a little for the things he’s done for you.”

“Nothing he did for me was free; it just didn’t cost full MSRP.”

“Still, that would allow them to put in their own backup generator.”

“Why the sudden interest in Jack and Marion?”

“I asked if she was a homemaker. She replied it was more like a housekeeper and she worked 5½ days a week keeping up their home and one day a week on her hobby, quilting. Although... maybe Jack began to see the light when he talked about her earlier today. Did you see her response to what he said?”

“The flabbergasted part or the tears?”

“You did see.”

“I looked at you and followed your glaze. You know that Single Barrel? I paid for all of it and that’s how I paid him for most of the things he acquired for me. Except the MUNS. Those cost \$5,000 cash, each.”

“What are they, made of gold?”

“You’d think so; they’re available retail for around eleven grand each. The 40mm grenades are packed as follows:

“Each box of HE, HEDP, and TP ammunition contains 1 can with 6 bandoleers of 12 rounds each, for a total of 72 rounds.

“Each wire-bound box of smoke and cluster ammunition contains 2 cans with 22 rounds each, for a total of 44 rounds.

“Each box of CS ammunition contains 2 cans with 4 bandoleers of 6 rounds each, for a total of 48 rounds.

“Each box of buckshot ammunition contains 12 bandoleers of 6 rounds each, for a total of 72 rounds.”

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 8

“What’s next after you finish the Tac-50 project?”

“Filling in our preps and finding a used 30,000-gallon propane tank. We can’t spend all we have on that hole in the ground.”

“Between us, we’ll have more than enough for that task and it’s not like our combined incomes will be insignificant. Why don’t we drive over to my apartment tomorrow and pack my clothing and the food I have? If time permits, we can empty the storage room and cut my expenses. With both pickups, we can haul quite a bit. Could you fix me a Margarita?”

“I’ll fix two. It will take a few minutes.”

“Good, I’ll shower and change into something more comfortable.”

What should have taken a couple of minutes took fifteen. I had to find my cocktail shaker and the metal top plus the strainer. Next, I added ice and squeezed three shots of lime juice. I added the lime juice, four shots of Grand Mariner and seven shots of Cervo 1800. After a thorough shaking, I wet the glass rims with lime juice and stirred them in the coarse salt. Finally, I divided the contents evenly, straining the mixture from the glass into two glasses and divided the remaining ice equally between the two glasses. I made a note that should we add a bar and it should probably have a blender.

“Here you go... Victoria’s Secrets?”

“Picked up a couple of outfits in Little Rock. You like?”

“Yeah, it doesn’t hide a thing. Maybe I should go shower.”

“Enjoy your drink, I’ll stay up. Umm, this is very good. You used the 1800, Grand Mariner and fresh lime juice.”

“You know what they say... *candy is dandy but liquor is quicker.*”

o

I showered and shaved before turning in. Joanne was still awake with a grin on her face. The thing about sleepwear that leaves little to the imagination is that it doesn’t seem to stay on very long.

I awoke to the smell of hot coffee the next morning. After a very quick trip through the shower, I dressed in one of my western cut shirts, jeans and boots. Joanne must have been up a while; she had showered and dressed in the same jeans with a clean form enhancing shirt.

“Eggs or pancakes? Bacon or sausage? Biscuits and gravy?”

“How about biscuits with sausage gravy and eggs. I’ll make a pitcher of juice.”

“Already made. Over medium eggs, two or three?”

“Two should be enough.”

“I sort of figured you’d go with biscuits with gravy and eggs since I couldn’t find a bottle of pancake syrup.”

“It’s there but it isn’t Aunt Jemima’s. It’s a half-gallon of Vermont Maple Syrup and the bottle sort of looks like a jug.”

“I did see it but didn’t recognize it for what it was. Ok, the biscuits are in the oven and the sausage is getting there. I’ll do the eggs while the gravy is thickening. Could you grab the bag of Gold Medal flour and pour the juice?”

“Here’s the flour. Large or small juice?”

“Large, I’m hungry this morning. I’m going to need to start getting up a half hour earlier from now on. That’s especially true since winter is a few short months away and my commute could take longer. Does your pickup have clothes bar hooks? All my dresses are on hangers.”

“Yes it does and I have a clothes bar.”

“Good.”

Joanne added milk to the sausage roux, stirred to blend and added butter to a large frying pan. She broke four eggs and as they started to turn white, removed the biscuits from the oven and plated them. She stirred the gravy and turned the eggs. She poured the gravy in a bowl and put the plate of biscuits and bowl of gravy on the table. She took two plates out of the cupboard and plated the eggs. After setting the plates on the table, she refilled my coffee, set the salt and pepper shakers on the table and joined me. I don’t believe what I had just observed could have been done more efficiently.

Since we had our day’s activities outlined, we ate in silence. Halfway through the meal, she lit the burner under the teakettle to reheat the water and refilled my coffee. I realized that what she’d said earlier about being married without the license and rings was totally true. If I had it to do over, would I have made the same decision? I was sure now that I would have, except I might have retired at twenty. I’d have gotten out at age 38 rather than 46 and we’d have been married for eight years, probably. I also realized that neither of us had any regrets. We were far better off financially by waiting those eight years. Perhaps more importantly, it was time.

◦

I had voted for George W. Bush in the 2000 election, with reservations. The reservations were best typified by the *hanging chad* issue. Junior had a hanging chad leftover from Senior's decision not to go after Saddam Hussein. In the interval between the Gulf War ending and through the Clinton years, Saddam had put down the US sponsored Shi'ite revolt and gassed the Kurds in northern Iraq.

Clinton had been shown to be ineffective by a series of blunders beginning with the Assault Weapons Ban, Whitewater from our area of Arkansas, the failure to pursue Osama bin Laden and the Paula Jones case that revealed the Monica Lewinsky scandal and ending with his impeachment trial. His bald faced lie about his relationship with Lewinsky essentially totally eliminated any credibility he had and left many unanswered questions about his relationship with Hillary.

Clinton's Vice President had run for office and apparently won the popular vote but not the electoral vote in 2000. The voting irregularities in Florida put the election results before Supreme Court which resolved the issues in favor of Bush. Gore didn't help his campaign with claims that he invented the internet, etc. He probably invented electricity and the telephone too. (God, and maybe A.G. Bell, respectively.)

◦

We drove over to Mountain Home and got Joanne's pickup, packed the contents of her storage room in the back of her pickup and covered it with a tarp. When we returned to her apartment, she began packing her clothing and I carried her dresses down to my pickup one armload at a time. Once she had her bedroom cleaned out, she started packing her kitchen and I hauled the boxes to my pickup. By the time she had her kitchen totally emptied, my pickup was full to almost overflowing so we tarped that load and returned to my/our house.

She moved her clothing and I moved the kitchen goods. Anything that went into the refrigerator or freezer went into the kitchen refrigerator and most of the cans and boxes of food went into the pantry. I had a passing thought that it was strange that she had a full bundle of U-Haul book boxes. She had been one step ahead of me from the moment I'd called and invited her to the housewarming. After she had her clothes put away and I had our kitchens combined, we worked together to move her preps to the shelter and firearms to the armory. Her kitchen table and chairs went in the shelter. I gave her the spare armory door key.

"How about we drive back to Mountain home and grab some lunch and move as much of the furniture as we can get in the two pickups?"

"You don't have that much stuff. Is the refrigerator and stove yours or the apartments?"

“They’re both theirs. All that I have left is the living room and bedroom furnishings. I can stop by each night before I come home and clean it up so I can get my deposit back. I gave notice after you invited me to the housewarming. If you wouldn’t have taken my subtle hint about getting married, I planned to move in anyway.”

“You did, did you?”

“Absolutely.”

“Don’t confuse her with the facts; she has her mind made up?”

“Right.”

“And what if I hadn’t taken the non-too-subtle hint and didn’t propose on my own?”

“I would have proposed to you.”

“And what if I had declined.”

“Tough. I’d have moved all by myself.”

“Pizza ok?”

“Sure.”

“Let’s get this show on the road. I think I’m going to have an aching back before the day is over. How long will it take you to get the apartment cleaned up?”

“Four hours or less, it’s not really that dirty and I already cleaned the stove.”

“Why don’t get we everything loaded and you stay and clean while I haul the first load and come back for the second load?”

“I like the way you think. I’ll get back my security deposit, last month and $\frac{2}{3}$ of the September rent, a total of \$1,600.”

The bedroom furnishings consisted of the dresser with mirror, a chest of drawers, a lamp table with lamp and the mattress, box springs, headboard and bed frame so I brought my tool box. The living room had her computer desk with her computer and monitor plus a box containing the contents of the desk. There was a sofa with end tables and lamps and a 27” color TV with stand. Had we taken her linens and the contents of the coat closet? I’d have to ask. From all outward appearances, everything left would fit in the two pickups. Joanne traveled light and didn’t accumulate junk. If there was any junk, it was probably at her folks place.

We had lunch and headed back to Joanne's apartment. Remind me to never piss her off; some of that furniture was heavy. She'd take one end I'd take the other and out we'd go with another piece. When the bedroom was down to the frame and headboard, she started cleaning while I dismantled, hauled and loaded. Next we hauled the living room furniture with the desk sitting inverted on the sofa and the lamps and computer in the back seat of my pickup.

"That's it. How long will you be gone?"

"About ninety minutes. Did we miss anything? Hall closet? Linens?"

"I'll check everything as I clean. If we did, we'll take it back with us after we stop by my folks."

"Tell them we're getting married?"

"No, they know that; I told Mom when you called to invite me to the housewarming. I just want to tell them we're getting married on September 11th. I'm sure glad we're getting married because living with you could have cost me my job. It would have eventually gotten out and set a bad example for the students."

"You must get leered at a lot."

"It bothered me at first but I'm inured. I dress down to the extent that I can but with my figure that only works so far. I have some of them for three years for Geometry, Trigonometry and Calculus. Since no one is aware that we have dated for years, some probably think I'm gay."

"I'm leaving."

"See ya."

It wasn't so much that I hadn't known Ron and June for years and as it was I was marrying their only child... after dating for about thirty years. When I got back home, I began to move her bedroom to the bedroom in the shelter and took the time to reassemble the bed. I had to take the drawers out of the dresser and chest to get them down to the shelter, making for extra trips. I also moved her TV and stand to the shelter along with her desk. Joanne could use my desk, the drawers were empty. It was in the master bedroom, so I put her computer there.

I was planning on getting satellite TV with internet but hadn't had time. Mr. Gore had taken his time with his invention and most of the internet access was dialup. When I was satisfied that everything was in its proper place, I headed back to Mountain Home.

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 9

“I’m back.”

“I’m done and gave her the keys. I missed the hall closet; can you take that to your pickup?”

“Got it.”

“I’ll bring the vacuum and cleaning supplies. Mom invited us for soup and a sandwich. They eat supper early on Sunday. We can spend an hour there and return home and unload the living room.”

“I didn’t see any radios.”

“They’re at Mom’s along with the unassembled antennas. The base stations and portables are still in their boxes. Only the mobiles are installed in my pickup. I ordered the radios for your wedding present, surprise.”

“Two birds with one stone?”

“Right. You’re going to need a second alternator or generator and battery for your pickup for the radios. You might consider an extended range tank and a spare tank.”

“It has two tanks. Why would I want an extended range tank?”

“More is better. We should think about a diesel tank too. We can stabilize it with PRI-D and add anti-gel. And don’t forget the storage room we talked about.”

“You’re a bundle of nervous energy.”

“I’m just excited. Aren’t all prospective brides excited just before their weddings?”

“I suppose.”

“Are you nervous?”

“Not actually. I think comfortable would be a better description.”

“Good. Let’s go.”

“What about your refund?”

“We can pick it up tomorrow before or after we shop for rings.”

“I suppose you picked them out as well.”

“Well... If you can stop and get sized after we get the license, he'll have them ready by the time you meet me to go ring shopping.”

Yep, she was one step ahead of me all the way.

“I thought if we ended up shacked up, I could wear the wedding ring to dispel some of the gossip. This is much better.”

o

“Ron, June. I'm sure you heard that I got shanghaied.”

“About time.”

“I agree. I understand there is some communications equipment for me to load.”

“There are two radios and two antennas. It will only take a minute; do you want to do that now?”

“That way I won't forget.”

“I suppose you think June and I don't know what's been going on the past twenty-five or so years. You two did a good job keeping it low key, I'll grant you that. We considered you more married than not. Take care of our baby David.”

“Yes sir.”

The radios were quickly locked in my pickup and the antennas loaded in back.

“Since we don't have pay for a wedding, we decided to just cut you a check if that's alright. We'll save a bundle over the cost of a wedding.”

“As you wish, along as Joanne agrees.”

“It was her suggestion and she left the amount up to us to decide.”

“Pretty strong headed, isn't she.”

“You've only seen the tip of the iceberg, trust me. Just don't give in to her every whim.”

After we'd eaten, Joanne and I went home citing the long day we'd put in as an excuse. Once home, we unloaded the remaining furniture.

“Night cap or Earl Grey?”

“Tea please.”

“Sounds good, but I’ll go with Darjeeling. What about an antenna tower?”

“I ordered a US Towers HDX-589MDPL, an 89’ tall crank up/down and the dealer will install the base, mount the tower and install the standoffs, vertical antennas, rotor and beams. I included extra stand offs for CB base, a Diamond D-130J all band scanning antenna, and a spare in case we get Motorola radios.”

“What about that MFJ 1798?”

“It will be mounted above the beam antennas. Maybe you can talk to a contractor about excavating the propane tank and the holes for the storage room and the larger propane tank. Once the new tank is in place, the dealer can transfer the propane, pull it, deliver and install it at Marion and Jack’s. I can’t imagine it taking more than four weeks to have all the changes made.”

“How many sets of PPE?”

“Four with spare filters. I’d prefer Millennium MSA gas masks. If you have a pad and pencil, we can make a list.”

1. Four sets of filters for the Safe Cells
2. The excavation we discussed
3. Find and install the newer larger propane tank
4. Pour the footings and floor for the storeroom
5. Erect and seal the concrete block walls.
6. Install a storeroom door
7. Get the PPE
8. Get the radiation equipment from Arrow Tech
9. Order eleven additional one year deluxe food supplies from Walton Feed
10. Get the communications gear installed in your pickup and make the necessary changes to the pickup
11. Add a 1,000 gallon or bigger diesel tank and a smaller gas tank
12. Finish furnishing the shelter with accommodations for 16 @ 8 people per dorm and get lockers for the dorms
13. Add a grounded metal storage cabinet to the shelter to protect sensitive electronics
14. Order a full beef, two hogs and two boxes of chickens along with additional butter, hams and bacon.

“Does anything else come to mind?”

“Not at the moment but we might consider buying those bags of breast and leg quarters instead of whole chickens. We should add sausage to the meat selection. We should also go through the pantry and make sure the shelves are full. We could put your dinnerware in the kitchen but maybe we should put it in the shelter. Or, since I have two

complete services of eight and it might be better to put those in the shelter and use your service of eight up here.”

“Note that on the list. I’d better get cleaned up and in bed. Tomorrow will come early and I’m exhausted. Maybe I can have them get a sub for me on Tuesday. It would sure make it easier in case the judge is running late or something unexpected comes up.”

“I plan on wearing my navy sports coat, tan slacks, white shirt and a tie, ok?”

“I have the perfect dress to complement that.”

“Jack will be wearing something similar and I have no doubt Marion knows how to dress. I’ll let him know we’re giving him the propane tank. You heard what he said about not knowing how Marion gets by on their income. It might be tough for them to come up with the price of a standby generator.”

“We can’t save the world. Let’s wait and see how things stand once we’ve finished.”

“Fair enough. Get your shower and let’s get some sleep.”

o

When we met at the Baxter County Clerk’s office at lunch on Monday, We were in and out in fifteen minutes. We grabbed a quick meal at McDonalds and Joanne returned to work. I went to the Jewelry store and had my ring sized. The jeweler said we could pick them up any time after four. With free time on my hands, I went to the furniture store and selected a small fold open bar. I also went to a department store and got a selection of bar glassware, an ice bucket, a blender and a small refrigerator to hold the beer and soft drinks.

After I returned home, I ran the glasses through a short cycle of the dishwasher, set up the bar in the living room and stocked it from the liquor selection in the pantry. I used the bottle rack in the pantry to store the Merlot neck down. The bar had a wine bottle rack. The small refrigerator was stocked with the beer, soft drinks and the garnishes. I noted that I needed bitters and grenadine. The various mixes went onto the shelf dedicated for that purpose. With that out of the way, I showered and changed into my western attire.

When I checked my watch, it was 3:45 so I grabbed my hat and returned to Mountain Home. I picked up the rings which Joanne had paid for and went to the liquor store for the grenadine and bitters. I added another bottle of 1800 and Grand Marnier and placed an order for two full cases of the Single Barrel emphasizing I’d prefer all 24 bottles from the same barrel. I got a replacement case of MGD and Coors Light plus added a case of regular Coors.

Finally, I drove to Ron and June's to meet Joanne. They insisted that we go out to dinner with them since it was customary to hold a pre-wedding dinner. Rather than push the issue, we agreed. On the way home after dinner, Joanne pulled into the Wal-Mart parking lot.

"I thought it might be nice to get a little shopping done for next Saturday. We'll use two carts. You can order the steaks and get more of that jumbo shrimp if they still have some. Get the cocktail sauce too. I'll be in the produce section or nearby."

I ordered the steaks, added a dozen tubes of Jimmy Dean sausage and a case of 2 pound packages of thick sliced bacon. I bought an additional 3 pounds of shrimp and some nice top sirloins. I also bought a round steak and hunted down the Minute Rice and frozen pepper strips. I bought a large bottle of soy sauce and a one gallon refill bottle. I found Joanne in the spice section where she made several selections. I got several packages of brown gravy mix. I noticed she had more baking potatoes, a carton of sour cream and the ingredients for another Macaroni Salad. There was also a squeeze can of cheese but no crackers. I assumed the cheese was a baked potato topping. She had real bacon bits, supporting my assumption. All in all, we ended up with about 1½ carts of food. I grabbed another bag of limes and additional bottles of the various drink mixes.

We drove home, unloaded our purchases and started hot water for tea.

"How much did you get done today?"

"I picked up the rings, bought a bar, glassware, ice bucket, a blender, a small refrigerator for the bar, bitters and grenadine, three cases of beer, replacement bottles of 1800 and Grand Mariner, a wine rack for the Merlot, two cases of Single Barrel, miscellaneous bar ware like a stirrer, wine bottle opener and so forth."

"Did you order the meat?"

"Sorry, it completely slipped my mind."

"How about the contractor?"

"I put that off to Wednesday too."

"Distracted?"

"Just busy. I didn't even think to get a haircut and that's been a weekly habit since I entered the Army."

"How about we get that bed set up and I put the bedding in the washer."

"I assembled the bedframe and headboard yesterday."

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 10

“I’ll start that load of laundry.”

While Joanne did that, I emptied the dishwasher and began the task of moving my service of 16 to the shelter, placing the dinnerware in the only place possible, the small overhead cabinet; it took me about 6 passes to get everything moved. I found that to-do list and I changed the number of cabinets from one to two.

“Watcha doing?”

“I moved the dinnerware to the shelter and we definitely need a second cabinet. There is no place to store things like spices and other pantry items.”

“What about the overhead cabinet?”

“It’s mostly filled with dinnerware.”

“Did you add it to the list?”

“Just did that. Paper plates and plastic utensils wouldn’t cut it if we were forced to stay there very long because we’d have a massive mound of garbage.”

“Are we on septic with a well?”

“Yes we are; why do you ask?”

“I’ll have to be careful about what I put down the drain. Perhaps you should get the septic tank pumped and lay in a supply of Rid-X.”

“I’ll add it to the list.”

“The list is getting longer.”

“I will talk to a contractor on Wednesday and get the main project underway. That’s the longest and largest project. I’ll check the web for used commercial propane tanks.”

o

The next morning we had the radio on during breakfast. Around 5:45, they announced a commercial jet had hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center. About 6:05, they announced a commercial jet had hit the South Tower. Around 7:40 they announced a similar strike on the Pentagon.

“Terrorists?”

“It has to be. I’ll get cleaned up and dressed for the wedding if you can follow the news.”

“I hope this isn’t going change our plans.”

“It might sound cold hearted, but New York and Washington DC are a long ways away. I’d guess this will be on every TV station in the US. Maybe we can leave early and go to your folks to watch.”

“Before we leave call Jack or Marion and confirm.”

“I will.”

“Why don’t we have TV?”

“I was planning on getting a dish with included high speed internet. I simply haven’t had time. I’ll add it to the list. We’ll need a receiver in the living room and a second in the shelter.”

I showered and shaved especially close. Once I finished dressing, I returned to the kitchen.

“Any more strikes?”

“Not so far.”

“It’s 7:30. You can get around and I’ll listen. By the way, the license is in my inner pocket, the rings in my right hand coat pocket and I have plenty of cash.”

“Call Jack.”

“Jack, David. Have you been following the news?”

“No, what’s up?”

“Commercial airliners crashed into both towers of the World Trade Center and a third into the Pentagon. But, I’m mainly calling you to remind you that the wedding is at noon.”

“We’ll be at the Baxter County Court House by 11:45 at the latest.”

“We’re getting around early and plan on stopping at Joanne’s parents to see the TV coverage.”

“You don’t have a TV?”

“We have two color TVs but no TV service yet.”

“We’ll be there.”

“Thanks see you two later.”

I heated water for tea and Joanne was back, ready to go at 7:55.

“I just heated water for tea. I did call Jack and they hadn’t heard about the terrorist attacks. He said they would be at the Court House by 11:45 at the latest. That means we should be there by 11:30 at the latest.”

“We’ll leave as soon as I have my tea and hit the bathroom.”

Around 10:05 EDT, they announced a fourth plane had crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. Something must have happened aboard the plane or the pilot made an error.

When we arrived at her folks around 8:30 both were glued to the set. Both WTC towers had collapsed and they reported that the Pennsylvania crash was caused by the passengers attempting to take control of the plane.

“I don’t believe we’ll need to have any reminder of our anniversary.”

“I agree. We now have a second *Day of Infamy*.”

“Did you two remember the license and the rings?”

“Here’s the license and here are the rings.”

“No diamond?”

“It was a rather short engagement. Joanne picked out the rings.”

“What was it, 3½ days?”

“Yes. I will get her an engagement ring if she wants one.”

“We have better things to spend our money on David.”

“You heard the boss.”

“What better things?”

“The house I bought came with a shelter and standby generator. It’s short on storage space so we’re going to have a contractor add a storeroom. The half full propane tank will be replaced with a much larger tank. We’re also going to stock and equip the shelter. I hope you know that should the need arise; you have a place to come to.”

“How big of a tank?”

“The generator burns over twenty thousand gallons per year. We’re going to look for a used 30,000-gallon tank.”

“That will run you anywhere from fifteen to twenty thousand.”

“I wasn’t sure what it would cost. I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Where is the money coming from? You’re talking about a total of twenty to twenty-five thousand dollars.”

“You know how frugal Joanne has been, don’t you? She was following my lead. Between us we’ve accumulated enough money. I paid cash for the house. We’ve both done things on a cash basis for about twenty-five years.”

“I know David. How many tons of buffalo poop do you want? Daddy always said I squeezed my money hard enough to make the buffalo on a nickel poop.”

“There’s nothing better than being frugal.” (Not capitalized.)

We watched TV and visited until 11:15. After a potty break, we headed to the Court House. Jack and Marion arrived about 11:40. I let the Judge’s clerk know we were there for our noon appointment to get married by the Judge. We were called to the Judge’s Chambers around 12:05 and out by 12:10. The four of us headed back to our home and turned on the radio. While they were listening, I called a dish company and arranged for a dish, two receivers and high speed internet.

Joanne and Marion prepared a light lunch of chicken salad sandwiches and Campbell’s cheese soup. During lunch, Jack opined that they’d take a rain check on the promised steak dinner. He wanted to get home to watch the developing story on Fox News and they were coming anyway on Saturday for the Wedding Reception. We couldn’t blame them for that and after they left, we changed back into our western duds and drove over to Ron and June’s, taking the sirloin steaks, baking potatoes and Caesar Salad makings with us. Ron and June were teetotalers because they were Southern Baptist so I didn’t take a bottle of Merlot.

By dinner time the news channels had moved from reporting to speculating. Ron turned the TV off and we sat down to the dinner June and Joanne had prepared. We did a little speculating of our own over dinner. After the dishwasher was loaded, Joanne suggested we head home. We were no more than out of sight of her parent’s home when she pulled out a pad and began making a list.

“Ok if we stop by Wal-Mart on the way home?”

“Do we need anything?”

“Not much. In light of the events of the day, I thought we should finish filling the pantry and add a little to the basement freezer; just a little of this and that. We were going to add bacon, sausage, hams and butter anyway so we can do that. We could use two bundles of Kraft macaroni and cheese. Another six cans of coffee won’t go to waste and we can get more Earl Grey. I thought we might just walk the aisles and pick up anything that strikes our fancy.”

“I see what you mean. I could use more razor blades and Edge. I also need a new toothbrush and tube of paste.”

“Choose what you need and buy double. We’re going to double buy for a while. I didn’t see any canned beef, chicken, ham or tuna. That will call for cream of mushroom soup and cream of celery and a few large packages of eggs noodles. Do you have oatmeal?”

“No, add it to your list along with Cream of Wheat.”

Let me tell you, we should have taken two carts. At least Joanne explained her choices as she made them. Tuna could be used in a tuna and noodle casserole or in tuna salad. Ditto for the canned chicken and the cans of ham made great ham salad. The canned beef was good for quick barbeque beef sandwiches. And so forth. I picked up a 3 pack of Edge and a four pack of blades, which she immediately doubled because I forgot she shaved her legs and used the same razor as I did, a Gillette Sensor.

She selected 24 cans of each vegetable she knew we ate based on our long dating history. I suggested a couple of others and why. As the cart neared being full, she went for a second. Some of the vegetables were transferred to the second cart so the egg noodles and spaghetti could go in the first cart with more macaroni. We finished when both carts were almost too heavy to push. After we checked out, I took the purchases out to the pickup and she went back for shampoo and a few other items. Eventually even Joanne couldn’t find anything else to buy.

“The general idea is to have a one year of short term what you eat items David. We’re maybe a quarter of the way there. Some preppers follow the line of buy what you eat and eat what you buy. If we end up with something we don’t eat, we eliminate it from our purchases and if we get a yearning for something we didn’t buy, we add it.”

“I’ll order the beef and pork tomorrow after I talk to the contractor. I’ll do the same with the bacon and hams. We’ll wait on the chicken quarters until we see how much space is free in the freezer.”

“Maybe we should add an upright freezer to the shelter. I’ll stop by the appliance store after school tomorrow and buy one and have it delivered. Is that ok?”

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 11

“Yes. You’re really into this prepping aren’t you?”

“There are some preparedness oriented forums I visit on the web and I enjoy the Patriot Fiction stories. TOM would cream his jeans at your firearms selections.”

“Tom?”

“Acronym for Tired Old Man. He’s from Palmdale, California. Jerry D Young is from Reno, Nevada. What do you think these attacks will lead to?”

“War with whatever country was behind the attacks whether they were state sponsored or not. This bin Laden character has been the fall guy most recently. They tied him to the attacks on the American Embassies and he’s on the FBI’s most wanted list.”

“Have them add lean meat from a dairy cow to use up all the fat and tell them you want twelve percent ground beef which is ground round. If you want American style Canadian bacon, tell them to smoke one of the loins and ask them to slice the regular bacon thick and put it up in two pound packages. Have them cut the round steak $\frac{5}{8}$ ” thick and the steaks however thick you prefer, 1” to $1\frac{1}{4}$ ”. Tell them to only pack $\frac{1}{2}$ of a round steak per package and two steaks or two servings per package. The ground round should be packed in one pound packages.”

“We’re here. How about I haul and you put the stuff away?”

“Fine, but I’ll take a load the first time.”

It took about forty-five minutes to have everything put away. What wouldn’t fit in the pantry ended up in the fruit cellar. We had a cup of tea and consummated our marriage, again. Joanne was up bright and early the next day and I fixed breakfast while she got ready for school. Around 8:00 I got a call from the installer concerning the radio tower and I waited until he showed up and showed him where Joanne wanted it.

I headed to Mountain Home and ordered the beef and pork according to her instructions. I then met with the contractor and we outlined the building project. When I mentioned excavating for a larger propane tank, he asked if I had found one yet. If I hadn’t, he knew where three thirty thousand gallon tanks were available. All they needed was new safety relief valves. If I paid for a tank, he’d move it and take care of the valve. I told him to go ahead. Since I didn’t have building plans, he offered to draw them up after the soil was excavated and he could see what the dimensions were.

When I finished with him, I stopped at Wal-Mart and bought several sets of shelving and ordered a case of Cure 81 $\frac{1}{3}$ hams, a case of Hormel thick sliced bacon, a case of Jimmy Dean sausage and a case of butter. I was told it would be available on Friday. I took the shelves home, hauled them to the shelter and stacked them.

I ordered 4 sets of Safe Cell filters, four sets of PPE with 2 cases of additional filters, eleven one year deluxe LTS food supplies from Walton Feed in the name of Joanne Cummings with delivery to our current address and lastly the radiation equipment from Arrow Tech that Joanne had listed.

o

“Busy day?”

“You don’t know the half of it. I ordered the beef and pork per instructions, set up the expansion with contractor; he had a source for used 30,000-gallon tanks. I bought several sets of shelving which I stacked in the shelter, ordered a case of Cure 81 one-third hams, a case of Hormel thick sliced bacon, a case of Jimmy Dean sausage and a case of butter. They’ll be in Friday. Next I ordered the Safe Cell filters, four sets of PPE with two cases of spare filters, eleven one year deluxe supplies from Walton and the radiation equipment from Arrow Tech. Oh, the guy came by and installed the base for the tower. At least I think he did, I showed him where you said to put it.

“Did the radios come?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“That could be because I ordered them for three day select delivery and the planes are grounded. Did you make an appointment to get your pickup upgraded?”

“Maybe tomorrow. I didn’t order a diesel tank either or schedule the septic to be pumped.”

“What did you do with the rest of your time?”

“I took a nap; I was exhausted. What was the reaction of the folks at Mountain Home High School about your getting married?”

“The staff didn’t really react, but when I wrote Mrs. Burns on the blackboard, I broke a few of the boys’ hearts. The girls were excited and wanted details, which I didn’t give them of course. I told them I married a longtime friend who had returned to the community.”

“All of which was true.”

“Yes, never lie. If you lie, you have to remember which lie you told to whom.”

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The wedding reception was a repeat of the previous Saturday except that it was held indoors due to the weather and we had a cake and Champagne. Ron and June actually relented and had Champagne, about one finger's width worth.

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Before the contractor had the storage room built, the US had invaded Afghanistan in Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan. They installed the larger tank, changed the safety relief valve and had the contents of the old tank pumped to the new tank about the time they were ready to apply sealer to the addition's walls. The leftover soil was spread out and reseeded, leveling a few low spots.

We now had dish TV with internet that had medium latency, whatever that is. The communications equipment had come in and been installed. A private mechanic made the changes to the pickup's electrical system and had ordered and installed the cross-bed fuel tank, a Transfer Flow unit. I had been able to get the replacement parts for my pickup and Joanne was dickering on her Dodge pickup.

All of the orders had been filled except for the Walton Feed order. Joanne said they were as slow as molasses in January. My new Tac-50 had arrived but the suppressor was still waiting on the tax stamp from the ATF. I was straining at the bit to get the Jet Suppressor and Surefire suppressors ordered but the dealer advised that the Surefire suppressors hadn't been released for sale as yet. He claimed once I'd been approved, subsequent approvals would move much quicker.

I had taken the CCW class and had submitted the application. It would be another wait of up to four months. We had picked up the bacon, ham, sausage and butter and later the beef and pork. Once we saw the amount of freezer space available, we bought 6 packages each of breast and leg quarters. A second round of shopping for STS filled the holes and brought us up to 6 months for two.

The tower was up and had all the antennas installed. Joanne picked up three Motorola narrow band VHF mobiles and had one installed in my pickup and a second set up in the shelter. She said since she was so close to closing the truck deal, she'd wait and only install her radio once.

Jack and Marion were filling their tank slowly at about 500 gallons per quarter. They had purchased a used Onan RS 12000. They had the tank we gave them mounted above-ground in cradles. An electrician had installed their ATS.

Around the seven month mark I received the tax stamp and picked up the Elite Iron suppressor. While doing so, I ordered two Surefire FA556A-BC-M16, two FA762S-BC-SA and one Jet suppressor from Mike's guns. All four of the Surefire suppressors would use the muzzle brake adapters.

I traded the suppressor to Jack for the Mk 211. I also ordered my first case of Hornady 750gr A-MAX Match from Cheaper Than Dirt (CTD). The next time Ammoman had XM118LR available or the M193 or M855 on strippers, we'd order more of that, too. The same applied to Speer Lawman in 9mm and .45acp. The Lawman was practice ammo and the Gold Dot was our carry ammo.

Reading between the lines, I could see the Bush was beginning to build a case for invading Iraq and wondered what politically motivated name they'd come up for that operation. The Clinton Administration had signed the Iraq Liberation Act in '98 and Congress was debating the Iraq War Resolution. It passed in October of 2002 and the UN had passed Resolution 1441 in November of 2002. The stage was set.

We just continued with our preparations, adding another quarter's worth of STS after filling the holes a second time. Ammoman had the ammo and we stocked up. I continued to buy one case of Hornady 750gr A-MAX Match from CTD each month. Somewhere, Jack had come up with additional MUNS and I bought one for Joanne's Loaded M1A. The tax stamps were back and the dealer installed the adapters on the rifles. I bought two complete sets of ALICE gear and added flap holsters, two stainless canteens with one cup and one stove and two double magazine pouches. I added the Y harnesses, and two bandage packs in addition to fanny packs set up as Bug out Bags.

We selected Micropur tablets and Katadyn Vario water filters with replacement elements, discs and carbon. For knives, we went with the Cold Steel San Mai III Military Classic and Counter Tac I boot knives, rounding out our selections with Bear 110 Folding Hunters.

There was one thing I did do differently; I transitioned to the Brenneke Black Magic slugs and Remington 3" 15-pellet Express Magnum 00 and 41-pellet No. four buckshot that Joanne preferred. The 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " shells were retained for backup. We mounted horizontal rifle racks in the armory to hold our long guns and a set of carpet lined shelves for the handguns. The ammo was stacked along the wall adjoining the store room and the military goods on the far wall from the storage room.

Over the many months, Marion had been setting back a few dollars and she purchased her own Loaded M1A and some surplus ammo to get her started. She told us she hoped to eventually buy the 168gr ammo Joanne preferred but she had her heart set on a Browning and a Mossberg.

Since we didn't have anything in .22LR, we bought each other 9422s for Christmas of 2001 along with a selection of clothes. I shopped Victoria Secret's and a western store while Joanne limited her selections to Penny's and the same western store. I essentially bought Joanne the same baby dolls she had except in different colors and she bought me pajamas. Our house gifts were Hudson Bay point blankets for both upstairs beds.

We spent Thanksgiving 2001 with Ron and June plus Jack and Marion. Christmas was different with Jack and Marion hosting some of her relatives and our spending the day

at Ron and June's. For 2002, we planned to reverse the schedule and invite Bob and Jill's families for Thanksgiving along with Jack and Marion.

o

What was married life like? About the same as the leaves I took, but it was 24/7/365. We occasionally disagreed but I'd learned to talk out the disagreements rather than fight. Joanne was right most of the time, anyway. During the early spring of 2002, we decided to grow a garden and I was tasked with getting it started as in rototilling the soil, etc. We purchased all the pint and quart jars we could find, especially pints. When there didn't seem to be enough pint jars I searched the web and found Canning Pantry. I quickly determined that they were the retail outlet for the company that manufactured Ball and Kerr jars. Their prices weren't any better than the grocery store due to the shipping costs, but they had product on hand. I bit the bullet and ordered 36 cases of regular mouth pints, a full case of regular mouth lids and a 30 quart All American pressure canner. This year we would plant potatoes, onions, peppers, green beans, and carrots. We'd plant one tomato plant for slicing tomatoes and a row of Roma tomatoes for sauces. If it worked out, maybe we could plant cucumbers in 2003.

I guess I got a little ahead of myself there for a moment, talking about Bush's plans for Iraq. As I said, you didn't have to be a genius to read between the lines and Junior was planning on cleaning up Senior's mess. We had a northern no fly zone, a southern no fly zone, dead Kurds everywhere and missing prisoners allegedly being used as subjects to test anthrax. Anthrax is a biological weapon, hence a weapon of mass destruction. The ultimate problem was common to some professional boxers, telegraphing their punches and Bush was sending high priority cables. He should have listened to Daddy more.

By the time school let out, all the garden crops were in and I was running the rototiller down the rows and hoeing where I couldn't rototill. Joanne pitched right in and grabbed the second hoe and our garden was clean, if nothing else. She got the idea to plant marigolds to keep the pests out of the garden. She claimed she got the idea from her Mom.

I hadn't bought a cold pack canner to prep the vegetables prior to putting them in the jars so we tried the garage sales, and then just bought one. The missteps were generally minor. I had planned on Russets and Yukon Gold spuds, and we ended up planting a single variety, Kennebec. Joanne said they produce potatoes as large Russets and were nearly as good as Yukon gold as a boiling potato.

As far as filling the propane tank, we added about \$3,000 worth a month since Joanne had elected a level pay plan receiving her income in 12 monthly installments. It balanced our efforts and it worked for me. And speaking about balancing efforts, I was working hard enough that I began to trim weight and couldn't keep up with her. When she was working in the garden and around the house, she generally wore her hair in a ponytail.

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 12

July was another of those filling the holes and adding another quarter worth months, which brought us to a one year supply of STS divided between the pantry and fruit cellar. Every time a box or jar was emptied she added to the fill the holes list. We even found time to go fishing a few times and added some largemouth bass to the freezer.

Joanne finally got that pickup bought and had it upgraded to handle the radios and added a cross-bed diesel tank. We went together and got her the same parts set I'd stored for my pickup including belts, hoses, brake pads and four new mounted tires. Once the radios were installed our pickups looked like police vehicles minus the light bar. She had a Dodge and I had a Ford and both were basically equipped the same.

I'd purchased 6 55-gallon drums of Castrol 15w-40 for the generator and assembled one set of shelves to hold the parts in the generator room. I also got an empty drum to transfer the dirty oil to and I also bought a set of manuals for the generator to have a maintenance guide. Unsure of the last time it had been serviced, I changed the oil and oil, fuel and air filters and topped off the radiator with 50-50 mix.

The leveling and seeding the contractor had done forced me to get a lawn mower and a weed eater. One small step at a time, our plans were coming together. I must admit that when she came home with 3 SAAs, a Winchester in .45 Colt and a Marlin 1895 Cowboy in .45-70, I was shocked beyond belief.

I asked her where her Tac-50 was and she said she planned to be my spotter. I realized that the only long arm I was missing was a short stroke gas piston 5.56. Between trying to fill the propane tank and adding 250-gallons of diesel fuel a month, the 5.56 was a very low priority. We'd ended up with a 2,500 gallon diesel tank and a 500-gallon gas tank. None of our four semi-auto handguns had suppressors and we were lacking integrally suppressed .22LR rifles and pistols. You can guess what was on our list in the firearms department.

We both realized that we had completed most of our preps but the Murphy never missed an opportunity to put you in your place. So when we had the chance to see our friendly class 3 dealer, we ordered two suppressed Ruger .22s and I inquired what he might have available in a gas piston 5.56.

He said I could choose between a Steyr AUG or and H&K G36, provided I could afford it. He recommended the G36A2 with German reflex sights. He strongly recommended against the Beta-C Mag. Even better, this purchase would be off-the-books and no tax stamp would be needed.

“Hot?”

“Above lukewarm. But, I can let you have it for \$2,500 cash, new magazines at my cost and a suppressor designed for the rifle at my cost plus 10%. It should only take 6-8

weeks on the Rugers and if you have the cash, you can take the G36 home. I'm Smith so you must be Jones."

"Joanne?"

"Go for it; it would be a shame if any of our military firearms was missing a suppressor and you don't have a 5.56."

"Survivalists?"

"In the original sense of the word, yes; so that means we call ourselves preppers."

"Bought a good amount of ordnance from me; are you short of anything?"

"The propane tank has a way to go before it's full. We're squared away on STS and LTS foods. We have the standby generator and a partially filled propane tank."

"Say 6-8 weeks on the tax stamps. Do you want to take the G36 with you?"

"Joanne?"

"We're about done, aren't we?"

"Getting close."

"Ok, bring it home."

o

"Do you still ride or did the accident eliminate your liking to ride?"

"It wasn't horse's fault. I still ride occasionally."

"Did you get rifle scabbards?"

"I didn't know where to look."

"You can get the Paladin holster from Alfonso's of Hollywood. You can get a matching Laredoan Cross draw rig with Conchos for 4³/₄" and 5¹/₂" Colts from Kirkpatrick Leather Company in Laredo. They also sell rifle scabbards. I should double up on my supply of .45 Colt and .45-70 Government. Want put in a prefab barn for the horses?"

"If we get horses, I want Andalusians."

"Question."

“What?”

“Are you pleased or upset with the buying jag we’ve been on?”

“Pleased. Our precious metal holdings have increased in value enough to offset our spending. And our savings accounts and both MMAs have good balances. The love of money may be the root of all evil but it’s nice not to worry how to buy our next meal. There is nothing inherently evil about money; it’s simply a medium of exchange. How one uses money may be evil... that’s a separate issue. How are Jack and Marion coming on their propane tank?”

“I think he said the last delivery of 500-gallons brought it up to between four and five thousand gallons. Apparently Marion added the Mossberg and is saving for the Browning. I got the impression that it’s rather a sore spot. We have the equipment we need. Can you help me learn to can the garden produce?”

“I can and will. Is all the shelving in the store room assembled?”

“Yes. I ran out of shelving before I ran out of floor space.”

“So move those oil barrels to the storeroom. I saw the shelves in the generator room. Do we have enough spares?”

“Enough to go through all 30,000-gallons if we ever get it filled. I set it up to cycle 15 minutes under load every month. I’m ready to take the exams for my radio license.”

“I’m ready to test for Extra Class. That’s something I think we should both get out of the way. How many sets of shelving do we need?”

“Six for sure.”

“Is it anchored?”

“Not yet. If you brought it up, it must be important. I’ll add to my list.”

o

We got the shelving and 12’x¼”x1” steel straps to connect the shelving. The shelving was laboriously anchored to the floor with ells and the steel straps added on top... just in case New Madrid let loose, I guess. Our barn was basically a 3 stall garage that was insulated and had propane heat. Joanne hadn’t found the Andalusians yet.

The garden output was almost beyond belief. We had 112 pints of green beans, 14 pints of canned carrots, 600 pounds of potatoes, a gunny sack of onions and 24 Ziploc bags of frozen peppers. Remind me not to can carrots again. The slicing tomatoes were a real treat; you can’t get something that tastes that good in any grocery store. We

picked and canned the Roma's as basic pasta sauce but the sauce could be used in any Italian dish by adding additional spices.

Joanne bought a used two horse trailer to bring the horses home in, when she found them. The Andalusian, she informed me, stood about 15.2 hands (62") and was a war horse. I replied that that would be a long way to fall. She said not to worry about it; we'd get me riding lessons before trying to ride real horses. She knew her own mind and I believe she knew mine every bit as well. She stocked up on COB and timothy hay to feed the horses and straw for bedding.

We picked up the Rugers and the only unsuppressed firearms in our military collection were the Para Ordnance .45s, the Browning and the PPK. Which, when I thought about it, was as it should be. We were making progress on the fuels, too. The diesel tank was full and stabilized, the gas tank was full and stabilized and we were working on the second 10,000-gallons for the propane tank. I couldn't imagine a situation where, once it was filled, we wouldn't have a lifetime supply.

o

The day after our first anniversary, Ron had a heart attack. June called 911 but by the time they arrived, Ron was beyond bringing back. Joanne arranged a sub and I met her at her parent's home. June was bordering on hysteria and Joanne wasn't far behind. I got the number and called their minister. After I explained the situation, he said he'd be right over.

The minister showed up with his wife in tow and the two of them were able to calm first Joanne and finally June. The minister made a phone call and excused himself to run an errand. He returned with a prescription issued by Rob and June's family doctor for a mildly sedative anti-anxiety drug. Joanne wouldn't take one when offered but eventually June did. Joanne asked me to go home and get the things on a list she'd quickly written. She would stay with her mother until after the funeral.

When I returned about an hour later, there was hot soup and chicken salad sandwiches. Her mother was lying down since the strain had gotten to her and Joanne suspected the 0.25mg Xanax had kicked in. She had the Xanax in her purse so she could monitor how much of the drug her mother took. She explained that not only was the drug very potent, it was highly addictive.

I returned home just after sunset, troubled because I didn't know what to do in this situation. When my parents died, Bob had handled everything. I had taken emergency leave and was only home about two days. Then Mom followed Dad and it had been a repeat of the previous experience. Eventually I got a check representing my share of the estate and I'd used it to buy gold coins. Until the housewarming, I hadn't realized there was any animosity.

The implication that Dad had worried himself to death over my enlisting was hard enough to take without the assertion that Mom had grieved herself to death over his loss. They were about the age Joanne and I are now. I couldn't see Joanne overreacting to her father's death, she was stronger than that. June, on the other hand, might be susceptible. But it was all in God's hands, whatever happened.

After the funeral and Joanne returned to teaching, she stopped each night on her way home to check on her mother. She said the June just seemed to be withering away, a little each day. She went on to say that she'd steeled herself that one of these days she'd find her mother dead when she stopped to check on her.

Eventually she found two Andalusian geldings that were four years old. So off we went to Kentucky very early one Saturday morning to pick up the horses. She paid cash and the tack they came with was new. It consisted of the saddle blanket, saddle, bridle and halter. We stopped by a Saddlery on the way home and picked up saddle bags and pommel bags with dual holsters for 5½" revolvers. In Jonesboro she stopped by a climbing shop and bought two 150' hanks of 7/16" static climbing rope rather than lariats. She said we'd carry the ropes in lieu of the lariats and they were far more practical because we weren't cowboys. She also picked some climbing gear which I identified as rappelling gear but the other stymied me.

"That's climbing gear honey. You can rappel down but you need a way to get back up so I bought Petzl Shunt multi-purpose devices which are designed for ascending as well as a backup brake for rappelling, occasional self-belays, or top rope belays."

"Uh... right. I've had a minimal amount of rappelling training but none on ascending."

"You were Air Mobile for a while weren't you?"

"Yes and that's why I learned to rappel. Why did you buy pommel bags with holsters?"

"Oh, I bought four more 5½" Colt artillery model revolvers. Your Colts don't have the transfer bar safety, do they?"

"No, mine pre-date that feature."

"We'll get you a set and keep yours for backup."

"The only thing you're missing is a side hammer coach gun."

"It's on order. The dealer had a devil of a time finding the same make and model as you have"

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 13

“Did you order the Colts, too?”

“I wasn’t sure so they’re being held until I could talk to you. Even after buying the horses and tack, I have a lot of cash so I think maybe we’ll get three loads of propane. We will continue to buy a load every month until it is full.”

“Feeling wealthy?”

“I hate loose ends. The shelter is essentially finished, we have our alternate transportation and we have the gardening figured out. Next year we’ll expand just a bit and provide Jack and Marion plus Mom potatoes and onions. I’d like to plant squash too.”

“Which variety?”

“Acorn, butternut and perhaps spaghetti squash; I don’t like summer squash.”

“Good, I don’t either. I think I like acorn the best followed by the butternut and spaghetti last.”

“We’ll plant mostly acorn and a few butternuts since they’re larger. We can skip the spaghetti because it’s my third choice too. That will let us plant more acorns.”

“We’d better stop and check on your mother on the way home.”

“We’re running late but, I suppose we’d better.”

“That’s funny; she doesn’t usually go to bed this early. There is not a single light on.”

“Do you want me to check first?”

“No, we’ll go together.”

We had to use Joanne’s key to unlock the door. She turned on a light when we entered and headed to her mother’s bedroom to check on her.

“DAVID!”

“Yes dear, what’s wrong?”

“She’s gone. She’s cold so there’s no telling how long.”

“What can I do to help?”

“Call 911 so they can confirm the death and take care of... whatever. Then could you make me a cup of tea? I’m suddenly very cold.”

First I called 911 and explained the circumstances. The dispatcher asked which funeral home and I told her. She said they’d dispatch a unit and the medical examiner. I put on the teakettle to heat water and got out the Earl Grey tea. The EMTs arrived before the water boiled. I let them in and led them to the bedroom. Joanne followed me to the kitchen and poured the boiling water and started her tea.

“I checked and her pill bottle had the correct number of pills based on the dispensing date so I don’t believe she overdosed on pills. She looked so peaceful; I think she just slipped off in her sleep.”

“They’re sending the medical examiner to pronounce and he will probably ask you about the pills. She has been failing hasn’t she?”

“More than I thought, I guess. I knew this day would come, but it doesn’t make it any easier. You need to go home and get the horses settled. Give them about ¼ bale of hay and a good scoop of the COB. Make sure the waterers are working okay and unload the tack. I’ll see you back here in about 90 minutes.”

o

I was well trained by now and did just as she asked. By the time the medical examiner had shown up and did his thing and the mortuary had picked up the body, I should be back. In fact, I was back in about one and one-quarter hours and the funeral home attendants were still there. Joanne walked over to her father’s safe, opened it and handed me a stack of papers and set out four bags.

“One is gold; the others each have \$1,000 face of silver dimes, quarters or halves. There’s no sense in including the precious metals in the estate since there is no record of ownership. The papers are the life insurance policies with mother and father as beneficiaries and me as co-beneficiary. She didn’t file the claim on Daddy and there’s a copy of the death certificate in the envelope with the policy. When we get her death certificate I’ll file both claims and convert the money into gold.”

“What about the house?”

“I’ll check to see if there is anything we might want and hold an estate sale. Then I’ll put the house on the market. Whatever is left after the estate closes will go into more gold or maybe propane, we’ll see. Could we go now?”

“Let me move the coin bags.”

“I’ll help. I’ll take the gold and the dimes. Stick the papers in your jacket pocket or whatever. I’ll lock up.”

Life insurance proceeds are exempt from income tax. There are mandatory exemptions in the estate tax laws. I thought that in this case the estate taxes wouldn't amount to much, but I was guessing. The date was November 9, 2002. The previous day, the UNSC had passed Resolution 1441. That was the final obstacle to going to war with Iraq. If they had a war, they'd have to do it without Jack and me. We were too old and too tired. We put in our time and a new generation could go get their butts shot off. I hadn't thought to mention that to Joanne.

◦

We basically cancelled Thanksgiving and Christmas due to all that happened over the course of the last year. Joanne had lost both parents even faster than I had. Her family line would end when she was gone. Where did that thought come from? Our Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner were the same, filets, baked potatoes and Caesar Salads. I received the five Colts for Christmas and Joanne received a Super Match identical to mine and that had been hard to do. Springfield Armory had to be persuaded to use the chrome moly barrel on the synthetic stock and install the Harris bipod.

I bought her the same scope as I had and the Surefire was just waiting on the ATF. I was able to buy the MUNS wholesale, but it cost more than the ones we had. In the clothing department, I had to get two more Victoria Secret's outfits, but these came with gowns. And we both shopped the same western wear store, buying shirts and jeans. However, since we had horses now, we added Outback drover's coats with linings and yellow rain slickers. We must have been in the same grove; she bought me a dozen sets of T-shirts and jockey's from Penny's.

Joanne had even washed them to get the sizing out and folded them the way I usually folded them when I did the laundry. Our house gift this year was a stacked washer dryer combo for the shelter and a Hudson Bay point blanket for our shelter bed. The proceeds from the insurance policies had filled the propane tank and bought a small amount of gold. The estate hadn't settled.

We hadn't taken a lot from the house. We'd taken all of the canning jars, the cold pack canner and the box of expired lids. June had an extensive collection of kerosene lamps including wall mounted and table top in several sizes. She also had several rolls of wicks and at least one roll in every width and type. Most of the lamps were antiques. There were also two Dietz Hurricane Lanterns (Blizzard). I copied the numbers and later looked them up on the internet. They were ~90 years old. While I was at that website, I copied information about wicks and fuels. It wasn't quite as simple as I thought. We needed clear kerosene with a flashpoint above 127°F.

◦

By February 2003, Mr. Bush had made his case to the American public about carrying the *War on Terror* to Saddam who had *Weapons of Mass Destruction*. Remember,

brown cows give chocolate milk and you heard it here first. We ordered more ammunition, buying M118LR from every source we could find. I rounded out my Hornady 750gr A-MAX Match to 4,000 rounds and in so doing got a very hefty discount. It was drop shipped from the factory in Grand Island. The tax stamp for the FA762S-BC-SA came and we had the suppressor installed.

“David, Harry. Say, what do you make of this propaganda campaign of President Bush’s?”

“Just that, it’s pure propaganda and he’s trying to justify invading Iraq to the American public. It’s not if, it’s simply when. I figure they will be in Baghdad within a month. This won’t be like the Gulf War though and we could be there for years. I suspect the Iraqis will fight a Fourth Generation War, an Insurgency.”

“Huh. The reason I called was to find out what I might have that you might want... you know ordnance and equipment. Three thousand gallons will fill my propane tank.”

“Jack, I don’t know what you have that I might want. Order a load of propane and I’ll pay for it and we’ll figure out later how to settle up.”

“I don’t know...”

“We have the money, believe me. Did Marion ever get her Browning Hi-Power?”

“She’s still saving up. They cost more than most .45s.”

“Let me know when they’ll be delivering and I’ll be there to pay for the propane, in cash.”

“You know how sorry we were about Rob and June, don’t you?”

“I do. It was tough all around. We cancelled our Thanksgiving and Christmas plans and just stayed home by the fireplace.”

“You don’t have a fireplace.”

“It’s a recent addition. It’s one of those high efficiency models, and with the fans can almost heat the entire house. Now if you had some firewood, I’d be glad to take that off your hands against the propane.”

“I do have some. It’s only about 25 cords, though.”

“Cut me five more cords and we’ll call it even, assuming it is all hardwood. You can haul and I’ll stack. I’ll just give you six thousand in cash and you buy all the propane you can.”

“You have yourself a deal. That will probably take at least thirty trips.”

“The fuel is on us, we have both gas and diesel. Our propane tank is full too, thanks to Rob and June’s life insurance policies. The estate hasn’t settled pending the sale of their home. I expect after estate taxes, Joanne will probably get about a quarter million, not including the insurance she has already received.”

“It must be nice.”

“You know Jack, it is, but look at the price Joanne and I paid to make it so; all those years of being alone and saving every penny over the cost of movies and my hobbies. And not one date in all those years for either of us.”

“Say, I’ve heard some scuttlebutt that the Corps might be bring back the LAWs. You’re familiar with the M72 aren’t you?”

“Hard to forget it; but we’re using the M136 AT-4.”

“Same scuttlebutt says they’re shit-canning them.”

“You have a source?”

“Maybe, but it’s iffy at best.”

“If you get some, keep me in mind. If you want to deliver the first load tomorrow, I’ll have the six grand.”

“I’ll load it this afternoon and be there bright and early.”

“Good, see you tomorrow.”

I went into Mountain Home and pulled six thousand out in cash. Then I went to the gun dealer and bought a pristine Browning Hi-Power. The only indication it was used was a tiny scratch on the slide caused when the owner dismantled it. The bore was as sharp as it had been when it came off the factory floor. It had a pre-ban magazine and I got that and 4 pre-ban 13-round new surplus magazines for the price of a new Hi-Power.

I had chicken breast fried and mashed potatoes and gravy made when Joanne arrived home.

“This smells good.”

“I hope it tastes as good as it smells. Jack called today. He questioned me about Mr. Bush’s plans and I told him it wasn’t if, just when so far as invading Iraq.”

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 14

“I agree with that. Is that all he wanted?”

“No, he was fishing about what they might have that we might need. They still need a load of propane.”

“And...?”

“I mentioned firewood and he has 25 cords cut and split. I told him I trade him a load of propane for 30 cords of hardwood.”

“That’s pretty close to market value. What did he say?”

“He’ll deliver the 25 cords now and the extra 5 cords as he cuts it. While I was at it, I picked up a very good used Hi-Power for Marion. That should round out their gun collection.”

“I can’t fault you for that, I had a similar thought. But it might be better if I gave her the pistol to avoid any misunderstandings.”

“You don’t think...”

“No, but why take the chance?”

“As long as you understand.”

“I do, believe me. The lawyer called and they’re ready to settle the estate. It looks like I’ll be getting about \$255,000, net.”

“Well, I was close.”

“What do you mean?”

“I was speculating a quarter of a million.”

“What do you want to do with it?”

“What do YOU want to do with it? It’s your inheritance, not mine.”

“I was thinking about precious metals, probably gold and silver Eagles.”

“Gold is on an upswing and silver won’t be too far behind. You should do what you think is best.”

“You think I wouldn’t?”

“I didn’t say that. You seem to be at least as savvy as I am when it comes to investments.”

“It seems so fruitless. We aren’t going to have any children to pass it on to.”

“We could always foster. I think we’re over adoption age.”

“Maybe if we could find a pre- or early-teen we could consider it. I’ll look into it.”

“Fair enough. How do you want to handle the Browning?”

“Get her to come with him on Saturday when he drops off a load and I’ll give it to her then.”

“Sure, I tell him that you want to speak to her about something.”

“Anything else?”

“He seemed to think the Corps is going to readopt the M72 LAWs.”

“That’s a lightweight rocket isn’t it?”

“Sixty-six millimeter. They are built by Talley but I believe that they’re manufactured under license from the same firm that produces the MK 211. If the Army replaces its M136s, they may be easier to come by. They’re 84mm and weigh about triple the M72. That’s offset by a slightly longer range. By the way, I unwound the ropes and rewound them to deploy easier. I don’t know what they call the technique but it’s a loop followed by a reverse loop.”

“That sounds like a figure 8 coil. I’ll check them to be sure.”

“Could be, but it’s how the communications guys coiled audio cables and other cables like power cables and it doesn’t look like a figure 8, it looks like a round coil.”

“Maybe you’re on to something. That sounds like it would come off the coils without tangling.”

“It does, but it could be because the cables have a sheath.”

“What do we need wood for?”

“Our new fireplace in the living room.”

“Oh really? I thought it was a stove.”

“Yes really, but it does sort of look like fireplace.”

“Ok, I can see that. Is it hardwood?”

“He said it is.”

“You cooked, I’ll load the dishwasher.”

“When do you think we’ll invade Iraq?”

“Best guess? I believe that we’re already moving personnel, equipment and matériel that way. It could be as soon as late March, early April. Bush has his mind made up and he’s not going to be confused by the facts. Despite the worldwide protests, it’s already in the works. I think that the Weapons of Mass Destruction issue is a scam. Even if Saddam has them, he’ll move them to another country and we’ll come up empty handed.”

“Why would he move them?”

“It would make the US and British look like fools. Keep in mind that the British supplied some of the intelligence Bush relied on. And, some of the other documents we produced have been denounced as forgeries. I reminded Jack about Fourth Generation War, which I believe this will evolve into.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s an insurgency. Two major examples are Vietnam and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. In a way, it’s how the American Revolution was fought using mostly irregulars. More recently it has evolved into an identifiable type of warfare. I even have an example called *Operation David*.

For General Braxton Butler’s 13th Armored Division, the invasion of Inshallahland had been a cakewalk. Inshallahland’s small air force had been destroyed on the ground in the first few hours. Apaches had knocked out most of the Inshallan tanks before his M-1s even saw them. Virtually all had been abandoned before they were hit. It seemed the Inshallan army just didn’t have much fight in it.

The 13th Armored Division swept into Inshallahland’s capital in less than a week, suffering only a handful of casualties in the process. The local government skipped the country, taking the treasury with them, and an American pro-consul now governed in their place. American-imposed secular democracy and capitalism would soon give the people a better life, or so General Butler thought.

But that is not quite how it turned out. Within days of the decisive American victory, graffiti began showing up, posting the message, “Now the real war starts.” It seemed those Inshallan soldiers who skedaddled so fast had taken their light weapons with them.

Some analysts said that was the Inshallah strategy from the outset, although General Butler didn't pay much attention to eggheads like that. His job was just to put steel on target.

So as the insurgency spread, that is what General Butler did. He called it Operation Goliath. He knew no enemy on earth could stand up to American firepower. All that was necessary was killing anyone who resisted and scaring everyone else into cooperating with the Americans. Methodically, in town after town in the 13th Armored Division's sector, his troops launched cordon-and-search operations. He kept his casualties down by prepping each town thoroughly, using air and artillery to take out any likely targets. Then, his tanks and Bradleys swept through. He was killing a lot of bad guys, he was certain; that much firepower had to do something. It made a mess of the towns, but fixing them was someone else's problem. Anyway, he was rotating home next week. In the meantime, Operation Goliath would clean out the town of Akaba.

Mohammed lived in Akaba. He was a poor man, like almost everyone in Akaba. But his tea shop across from the mosque allowed him to feed his family. He was even able to save some money so that someday he could go on the Hajj.

When the troops of the 13th Armored Division first came through Akaba, months before, Mohammed had watched. There wasn't any fighting, thanks be to Allah, but the American tanks had ripped up some roads, crushed sewers and water pipes and even knocked down a few buildings. An American officer had promised they would pay for the damage, but they never did. Still, life went on pretty much as before. No one collected taxes now, which was good. Some foreigners, not Americans Mohammed thought, had set up a clinic; they were welcome. The electricity was on more often, which was also good. Anyway, the Americans would leave soon, or so they said.

Of course, the mujahidin were now active in Akaba, as they were everywhere. Mostly, they set bombs by the sides of roads, targeting American supply convoys. He had watched an American vehicle burn after it was hit. Mohammed felt sorry for the American soldiers in the burning truck. They were someone's sons, he thought. War was bad for everyone.

When the bombing started in the night, Mohammed did not understand what was happening. Huge explosions followed, one after another. Quickly, he got his family out of the rooms over the tea shop where they lived and into the mosque across the street. He did not know who was doing the bombing, but perhaps they would not bomb a mosque.

At daybreak, the bombing stopped and American tanks came down his street. This time, they did not just pass through. American soldiers were kicking in the doors of every building and searching inside. The Americans were attacking the mujahidin. He knew some of the mujahidin. They were poor men, like himself. They had few weapons. The Americans had on armor and helmets. Their tanks were enormous, and from the door of the mosque he could see their helicopters overhead, shooting anyone on the streets. Butchers! Murderers! How could human beings do this?

An American tank stopped near his tea shop. Suddenly, two mujahidin, just boys, ran out from the alley by his shop. They had an RPG. Before they could fire, the Americans' machine guns cut them down. By God, what an awful sight! Then the tank swiveled its enormous gun. It fired right through his shop into the alley. His business and his home were destroyed in an instant. "God curse them! God curse them!" Mohammed wailed. In less than a minute, he had lost his home and his livelihood.

American soldiers came into the mosque. They kept their boots on, defiling the holy place. They were screaming in a language Mohammed did not understand. His wife and children were terrified of the soldiers. In their helmets and armor and sunglasses, they looked like jinn, not men. Quickly, Mohammed pulled his family into a corner and stood in front of them to protect them. He was a small man and had no weapon, but his honor demanded he defend his family. He could do nothing else.

Three American soldiers came up to him, still screaming. He did not know what they wanted. Suddenly, two of them grabbed him and threw him on the ground. One put his boot on Mohammed's head to hold him. Enraged by the terrible insult, the humiliation in front of his own family, Mohammed struggled. Another soldier kicked him in the groin as he lay on the ground. Retching with pain, he watched as the Americans ran their hands over his wife and daughter. They did something with his hands too. He did not know what. Then they let him go and moved on.

Back in the 13th Armored Division's headquarters, General Butler's replacement had arrived. Major General Montgomery Forrest was invited by General Butler to join the brief on the progress of Operation Goliath. "Yesterday was another major success," General Butler told his replacement. "We pacified the town of Akaba, killing at least 300 muj and capturing 17. We've got a pretty good template for how to handle these places, and I don't think you'll have any problem picking up where I've left off."

That same day, Mohammed and his family were approached by Rashid. Mohammed knew Rashid was a mujahidin. "We are sorry for what the American devils did to you yesterday," Rashid said. "My cousin said you and your family are welcome to live in his home. Here are 5000 dinars to help you. We will also help rebuild your home and shop when the Americans have been driven out, God willing."

"Praise be to God for your generosity," Mohammed replied. "I want to fight the Americans too. But I am not a soldier. I saw how the American tank killed those two boys by my shop. The dogs even ran the tank over their bodies. You must have suffered many dead yesterday."

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 15

“Actually, praise be to God for his protection, we only had eleven men killed. The two you saw martyred were new to us. We told them to run away, to be safe until we could train them. But they took a weapon and attacked anyway. Now they are with God. But if you will join us, Mohammed, we will not throw your life away. We will train you well, so that when you fight the Americans you will kill many of them before you are made a martyr yourself. And we take care of our martyrs’ families, so you will not need to worry about them. Thanks to the faithful, we have plenty of money, and weapons too.”

“Do you know what the American dogs did?” Mohammed said. “They put their boots on my head, in front of my family. By God, I will fight them. I will be a suicide bomber myself.”

Mohammed’s son, who had just turned 13, had been listening to the conversation. “Father, I want to avenge our family’s honor, too. I want to be a suicide bomber also. Once I took candy from the Americans. Now I hate them more than I fear death.”

“My son, if you had said this to me the day before yesterday, I would have beaten you. Now I give you my blessing. Go with Rashid and do whatever he tells you. Perhaps God will allow us to be martyrs together.”

A week later, General Butler had departed for his important new job at TRADOC, where he would oversee the development of counterinsurgency doctrine. The division staff had worked hard on their first brief for the new CG. With 714 PowerPoint slides, they would show him how Operation Goliath would pacify its next target, the town of Hattin.

The general was seated in the first row, coffee cup in hand. But before the briefer could begin, a lieutenant colonel in the seventh row of horse-holders stood up. “General Forrest, before this brief starts, I have something I’d like to say.”

Every head swiveled. Who was this guy interrupting the brief?

“Colonel, I apologize, but I’m so new here I’m afraid I have to ask who you are,” General Forrest replied.

“I’m Lt. Col. Ed Burke, sir, commander of 3rd Battalion, 13th Armored Division. Hattin is in my sector. Sir, I apologize for interrupting the briefing, but I’ve got something I have to get off my chest.”

“Don’t worry about the damn briefing,” General Forrest replied. “Personally, I hate PowerPoint.” The staff’s sphincters tightened in unison. “What have you got to say?”

“Sir, I respectfully request that Operation Goliath not be carried out in Hattin.”

“Why not?”

“Because it will make the situation there worse, sir, not better. I’m not saying we don’t have problems in Hattin. We do. But while we don’t have a 100% solution to the insurgency there, we have maybe a 51% solution. Operation Goliath represents the opposite of everything we’ve been doing. In my personal opinion, if Operation Goliath hits Hattin, it will make our job there impossible. It will work for the resistance, not against it.”

“This guy’s toast” whispered one colonel on the staff to another.

“Well, I tend to think 51% solutions may be the best we can do against insurgents,” said General Forrest. “Why don’t you tell us what you’re doing? Come on up front here and take over. The staff can just give me the briefing text and I’ll read it over in my spare time.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Lt. Col. Burke. “We call what we’re doing in Hattin Operation David. Sir, may I begin by asking the division staff how many casualties we have suffered in Akaba?”

The Division G-3 glared at Burke, but General Forrest looked like he expected an answer. “We have suffered five KIA since yesterday morning, with 23 wounded, 18 of which had to be evacuated. Resistance is continuing for the moment, so I cannot say this will be the final casualty total. I expect all resistance will be crushed sometime tomorrow.”

“Don’t count on that,” said General Forrest. “Lt. Col Burke, please continue.”

“In Hattin, since my battalion took over four months ago, I have had two KIA and five wounded, all in two incidents. I have had only three successful attacks on American convoys in my whole sector, all by IEDs. As you know, General, metrics are pretty worthless in this kind of war. But as best we can tell, only 1% of the population in my sector is actively hostile. We believe we have caught everyone responsible for planting the IEDs that hit our convoys. We have captured over 1,000 insurgents. Most important, we have not killed a single Inshallan civilian.”

“Excuse me, Lt. Col. Burke,” interrupted the G-3. “My records show you forwarded only 237 captured insurgents, not 1,000.”

“That is correct, sir,” replied Lt. Col. Burke. “All locals whom we capture we release. But first, we keep them with us for a while to show them what we are doing. They see with their own eyes that we are treating people with respect and trying to help. They also get to know my soldiers, whom I have ordered to treat detainees as guests of the battalion. Only if we capture someone a second time or if they are not from Hattin do we forward them to division as prisoners.”

“Is this a hearts and minds strategy, Colonel?” asked General Forrest.

“Not exactly, sir. We don’t expect the locals to love us. We’re foreign invaders and infidels to them. Our goal is to keep them from hating us so much that they fight us. I think we’ve done that pretty well, sir.”

“Colonel, why don’t you start from the beginning and tell us the whole story of Operation David,” said General Forrest.

“Yes, sir. Well, when we knew where our sector was going to be I gathered all my officers and senior NCOs, and some junior NCOs and troops as well, and told them the result I wanted. The result was what I just told you, sir. I wanted to operate so that the locals would not hate us enough to fight us. Then I asked how we could do that. They talked, and I listened. I had an advantage in that we have a company of National Guardsmen attached. A lot of them are cops. I think cops understand this kind of situation better than a lot of soldiers do.”

“The cops made one very important point right at the beginning. They said the key to keeping the peace is to de-escalate situations rather than escalate them. Soldiers are taught to escalate. If something isn’t working, bring in more firepower. Cops don’t do that, because it enrages the community. So that was one piece of the puzzle.”

“Another came from our battalion chaplain. He opened the Bible and read the story of David and Goliath. Then he asked how many of us were rooting for Goliath? My light bulb went on at that point, and I said what we want is Operation David.”

“An NCO said that if we want to be David, we should just carry sling-shots. Everybody laughed, but I saw his point. I said we won’t go in with M-1s and Bradleys. Just HMMWVs and trucks. A private said let’s ditch the helmets, armor and sunglasses. They just make us look like Robocop. I said, “He’s right, so we’ll do that too.”

“Are you saying you aren’t using all your assets?” the G-3 asked.

“That is correct, sir,” Lt. Col. Burke replied. “One of our first rules is proportionality. A disproportionate response, like using an M-1 tank against a couple lightly-armed mujahidin, turns us into Goliath. It is a great way to make the locals hate us so much they will fight us. It also makes us look like cowards.”

“That sounds like you are taking unnecessary risks with American lives,” the G-3 responded.

“Sir, how do we lose more American lives, by using our own light infantry against their light infantry, or by turning on massive firepower that serves as our enemies’ best recruiting tool? Sir, I have to wonder if you are missing the forest for the trees.”

“Personally, I am more interested in the forest,” said General Forrest. “Please continue, Lt. Col. Burke.”

"Yes, sir."

"One of my National Guard officers said that in Bosnia, where he served, the Europeans and the locals all laughed at us for hunkering down in fortified camps and seeming scared all the time. It's the old Force Protection crap. So I said, 'Can it.' No Fort Apache. We'll live in the towns. We will billet with the people, paying them well for the quarters we occupy. We'll shop in the local markets, drink coffee in the local cafes. In Hattin, my headquarters is over a row of shops, right down town. We protect the shopkeepers, but they also protect us. They don't want their shops blown up. I have troops living that way all over town. I let my captains, lieutenants and sergeants work their areas the way they see fit, blending in as much as possible.

"With that kind of dispersion, how do you control your men?" asked the pissed-off G-3.

"I don't," Lt. Col. Burke shot back. "I believe in command, not control. I give my subordinates mission orders. They know the result I want, and I leave it up to them how to get it. If they need help, they come see me and we talk. Otherwise, I trust them to get the result. If one of them can't, I relieve him."

"Tell me about your KIA," General Forrest interjected.

"Yes, sir. It happened within the first couple weeks. A suicide bomber in a car hit one of my patrols. I lost two KIA and three wounded, all with limbs blown off. But 11 Inshallans were also killed and 32 wounded. I immediately ordered that we treat their wounded just like our own. We sent them on helos to American-run hospitals, not the crummy local ones. We transported their families to the hospitals to see them, and when they were well enough we brought them to their homes. We also gave money to the families that had lost wage-earners."

"Moslems bury their dead immediately, and I and my men went to all the funerals. Then I had memorial services for my two KIA and invited the townspeople. Many came, including three imams who offered prayers. That had a huge impact locally. I then asked the imams if they and their colleagues would give classes on Islam to me and my troops. That also had a huge impact, and it helped build my guys' cultural intelligence."

"Sir, my other two wounded happened like this. A couple kids with AK-47s jumped one of my patrols. They couldn't really shoot, it was just pray and spray. Despite two men down, my guys did not shoot the kids. My patrol leader charged them and they dropped their weapons and ran. When he caught them, he brought them back to the ambush site, pulled their pants down and spanked them. The crowd loved it, and the kids were humiliated in front of their buddies instead of being heroes. Both of my guys have since returned to duty and the kids' parents have apologized to us. They were very grateful we did not shoot their sons."

"How did you train for this?" General Forrest asked.

“Well, sir, as one example, when I took my battalion through the ‘local village’ training stateside before we deployed, I reversed roles. I had my guys play the villagers, and I had troops who didn’t speak their language sweep through on a typical cordon-and-search mission. I made sure the troops treated my villagers like we too often treat locals – screaming at them in a language they did not understand, throwing them around, detaining them in painful positions, and so forth. The result was just what I wanted – a lot of fights. My guys got so angry they started throwing punches. Then in the debrief I asked them, ‘If we don’t want the locals to fight us, how should we treat them?’ The fact that they had been on the receiving end helped them see themselves in a whole new light.”

“I think I might want to do that with my other units,” General Forrest said. “Please continue.”

“Yes, sir.”

“From day one, our message to the people of Hattin was, ‘We’re not here to take over. You are in charge. You tell us what to do that will help you.’ We helped them bring in NGOs to set up clinics and distribute food. We put our troops to work under the local Inshallan engineers and technicians to improve the infrastructure. I made my HQ a ‘go to’ point for the Inshallans when they needed parts or equipment. Over and over, we made the point that we are there to serve. On security, we let the mayor and the local police set policy. We only help when they ask us. They want order, which is what we want too, only they know a lot better than we do how to get it in their society.”

“We understand that real psyops are not what we say but what we do, and God help us if the two are different. The people of Hattin now understand that we are not there to change the way they live, or to make them live by our rules. Hattin is a fundamentalist Islamic city, and some of their practices bother us. But this is their country, not ours. I’ve had signs put up in all our buildings, in Arabic and in English, that say, ‘When in Inshallahland, do as the Inshallans do.’ We go out of our way to make it clear that we do not see our way of life as superior to theirs. We are not somehow ‘better’ than they are. In cultures like this one, honor and pride are very important. If we seem to lord it over them, they have to fight us because their honor demands it.”

“Stop for one minute, Colonel,” interrupted the G-3. “We have similar humanitarian assistance programs as part of Operation Goliath. After we have secured a town, we bring in NGOs too. Do you know what the insurgents do to them? They capture them, hold them for ransom and then cut their heads off! Are you telling me that does not happen in Hattin?”

“Well, that brings us to the next level,” replied Lt. Col. Burke. “Life is harder for insurgents in Hattin than in the towns where Operation Goliath has left its heavy footprint. It is easy for insurgents in your towns to gain the people’s support because Operation Goliath has made Americans hated, hated bad enough that lots of people want to see them

killed. That is not true in Hattin. Why would people want to capture aid workers when they are just helping?"

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 16

“You are not answering my question,” barked the G-3. “Have any of your aid workers been captured?”

“Yes. Unfortunately, there will always be some people that we refer to as ‘bad apples.’ Operation David has kept their number small, but they exist. We have to deal with them in a very different way. We have to capture or kill them.”

“That’s no different from what we do,” said the G-3.

“Yes it is, because how we do it is different,” Burke replied. “We never do cordon-and-search. We never kick down doors. We never terrorize civilians or call in heavy firepower. If we have to take someone out, our preferred option is to take out a contract on them. Locals do the dirty work, and we leave no American fingerprints.”

“If there is an insurgent cell that is too tough for locals to handle, we send in our Nighthunters, our equivalent to Delta Force. They are experts in low-impact combat. They specialize in being invisible. Local citizens never see them or deal with them. That enables us to keep the locals from seeing the average American soldier as a threat. Our cops put the Nighthunter concept together. It is like a SWAT team. People don’t confuse SWAT with their local cop on the beat. Every time we’ve had an aid worker taken hostage, the Nighthunters have rescued them within 24 hours.”

“Lt. Col. Burke, I’m the PAO on the 13th Armored Division staff,” said a reservist. “How are you working the press problem in Operation David?”

“By playing one media operation off against others,” Lt. Col. Burke replied. “I thought from the beginning that we would get favorable media coverage of what we are doing in Hattin, and on the whole I’ve been right. Ninety percent of what we do is open to any reporter who wants to come along. That includes al Jazeera.”

“Just once, early on, al Jazeera did an unfair and inaccurate story on one of our operations. In response, instead of kicking them out of Hattin, I invited al Arabiya in. I knew they were competitors. I encouraged al Arabiya to do an investigative report on the operation al Jazeera had portrayed negatively, and I opened all our records up to them. Their report showed that al Jazeera had been wrong. Since then, al Jazeera has been very careful to get their facts right in Hattin. And that’s all I ask. If we do something wrong and they report it, that’s our fault, not theirs.”

“It sounds to me as if Operation David requires superb local intelligence,” General Forrest said. “How do you obtain that intelligence?”

“The same way cops do, by talking to the local people all the time,” Lt. Col. Burke answered. “Remember, we haven’t made ourselves hated. We buy from locals all the time. Good customers become friends, and friends pass information to other friends.”

“The real problem is the language barrier. We’ve worked on that a number of ways. Of course, we’ve hired as many locals as interpreters as we can. I have them give classes each day to all my troops, so they learn at least some phrases and common courtesies in the local language. Each of my men has a pack of flash cards with basic phrases in English and Arabic, the Arabic spelled phonetically and also in script. If he can’t say it right, he can point.”

“Again, our Guardsmen have been a tremendous help. They come from Cleveland, Ohio, which has a large Arabic-speaking population. With the support of and funding from the State of Ohio, when they knew they were deploying here, they offered special one-tour enlistment packages, with big bonuses, to anyone in Cleveland who could speak Arabic. It didn’t matter how old they were, there was no PFT, all they wanted was translators who they knew would be loyal to us. Those guys are terrific.”

“Finally, I’ve told the locals that anyone who works for us will be eligible for a Green Card when American forces leave Inshallahland. Frankly, General, I’ve gone out on a limb here. That promise has done more than anything else to give us the language capability we need, but I don’t know how I am going to keep it.”

“Let me work on that one,” replied General Forrest. “I think that is a great idea, and I have some friends back in Washington who may be able to help us do that.”

The Division G-2 had been listening intently to the discussion. “Have any of our intelligence systems been useful to you, Colonel?” he asked Burke.

“Yes and no,” Burke replied. “I have to say that virtually all the Intel we’ve received from higher has been either too late or wrong or both.”

“That’s no surprise to me,” replied the G-2. “Our systems were all designed to collect and analyze data on other state militaries. What are our satellites supposed to do in this kind of war, watch a twelve-year old boy pick up a stone?”

“But we have used technology effectively on the local level,” Burke continued. “We use our superb night-vision capability to cover virtually all of Hattin at night. I have night OPs everywhere. With rare exceptions, all they do is observe and note patterns. We don’t hassle people for being on the street at night. As any cop will tell you, safe streets have people on them, day and night. It is empty streets that are dangerous. If my guys see something going down, it’s usually street crime, so they call the local cops. Of course, the locals know we are doing this – the locals know everything we do, often before I know it – but because we don’t hassle them, it’s OK. Remember, they want safety and order.”

“We have also emplaced small, camouflaged cameras and listening devices in some key places. I’d rather not go into too much detail as to how many and where. But I can say that there aren’t many phone conversations in Hattin, or meetings in large spaces,

that we are not aware of. All this information is available to any of my leaders who want it, right down to the squad level. It is an open-architecture Intel system. We do not hoard intelligence in my HQ. I'm not a dragon who wants to sleep on a pile of gold."

The G-2 smiled. "If I could trade my eagles for captain's bars, I think I'd enjoy being your S-2," he said.

"Why don't you do that?" asked General Forrest. "See how they are making it work, then come back here and try to do the same thing for me."

"Roger that, sir," said the G-2. "Gee, I'll really miss all my computers. I might even get to see the sun."

"You are welcome to come back with me and stay as long as you want," Burke said to the G-2. "Just be aware that our Intel system, like everything else, is a flat network, not a hierarchy. My units pass Intel laterally and down, not just up a chain. It's like German-style armor tactics, in that we are more reconnaissance-driven than Intel-driven."

"That's how the tactical level has to work," said the G-2.

"Can you give me an example?" asked General Forrest.

"Easily, sir," Burke replied. "Let me come back to the G-3's question about kidnapping. The first time that happened, we immediately tapped our whole human Intel network. The main way we did that was by having our guys go to the cafes and tea rooms and put out the word, which included a lot of cash for Intel that proved good. Then I gathered all our squad and platoon leaders and asked them to game the situation. In a matter of hours we were sure we had the location, and when the Nighthunters went in, we were spot on. Of course, the fact that we were able to do that and do it fast sent a message to the insurgents and to the whole town, so the rescue had strategic as well as tactical meaning. It played on the physical and mental levels of war, and I think perhaps on the moral level as well, because even though we had to use violence no innocents were harmed. In fact, as is usually the case in Nighthunter ops, no one was killed."

"You didn't kill the enemy?" the G-3 interjected.

"No, sir, we try not to. Sometimes we can't avoid it, but in a clan and tribe-based society like this one, if you kill somebody you have a blood feud with his relatives. Because the insurgents don't have gas masks, the Nighthunters usually flood the place with CS, and then just walk in and round people up. We treat all the captives with respect, and when we do kill someone, we pay blood money to his family, clan and tribe. Remember, sir, we are always trying to de-escalate, not to escalate. We don't want to create martyrs for the other side."

"Of course, there are situations where we do want bloodshed. We constantly try to identify factional divisions among the insurgents. When we find one, we try to escalate it, to

ramp up friction within the other side. We use lies and deceptions to bring one faction to the point where it wants to whack another, then we find discreet ways to help them do that. We do it in such a way that they all start blaming each other. Often, the insurgents do our most difficult jobs for us, killing their own leaders out of fear of being stabbed in the back. Remember, this isn't a culture that has much trust in it."

"One time, we planted someone to get kidnapped. He was a Nighthunter disguised as an NGO worker. We had implanted a tracking device in his body. During his captivity he was able to learn a lot about our enemies. It was easy to rescue him because we knew exactly where he was."

"We often spot people who are trying to bring weapons into Hattin or hide them there. We do not interrupt those operations. We don't try to capture or destroy those weapons. Instead, one of our Guardsmen knew of some stuff we could spray on their ammunition that they would not readily notice but would cause it to jam in the weapon. I had cases of the stuff in spray cans shipped in from Cleveland. We sneak in and spray their ammo stocks, then when they try something, their weapons don't work. That really undercuts their morale. If we seized or blew up their weapons, they could fight us by bringing in more or learning to hide them better. But they can't fight us because they don't know what we are doing. Their operations fall apart and they don't know why."

"They cannot ambush us because we follow no predictable patterns. They cannot surprise us because we are always watching, and they don't know when or where they are being watched. They cannot fight back without alienating their own people. All they see is the smiling faces of my men, who have now become part of their neighborhoods and communities."

"Anyway sir, that's Operation David. It's working in Hattin and in the rest of my sector. All I'm asking, sir, is please don't destroy everything we've worked so hard to build by having Goliath stomp on Hattin. There are plenty of other towns out there to wreck. Let Goliath go somewhere else."

"Well, Colonel, I think that is a reasonable request," said General Forrest. "I can tell you where Operation Goliath is going next. It is going in the wastebasket. Colonel Burke, I suspect Operation David could continue in Hattin without you for a while."

"Yes, sir, it could," Burke replied. "I didn't create Operation David and I don't run it. My men created it and they run it."

"Good, because I want you to come here, take over the G-3 shop for a while and expand Operation David to the whole 13th Armored Division. Can you do that?"

Lt. Col. Burke thought for a few moments. "I think so, sir, if you will allow the men in the other battalions to do what mine have done."

"I will," said the general. "Meanwhile, I would like to ask my G-3 to go back to Hattin with your battalion, as an observer.

"Aye, aye, sir," responded the G-3, with a distinct lack of enthusiasm. He sensed that his moment might have come, and gone.

"One final request, Colonel Burke," said General Forrest. "Do you think you might present the division's Operation David to me without PowerPoint?"

"Yes, sir!" said Burke, grinning. "With your permission, I'd like to do with the division's PowerPoint stuff what I did with my battalion's."

"What is that, Colonel?" General Forrest asked.

"I let the insurgents capture it. It's slowed their OODA Loop down to a crawl."

"Another good idea, Colonel," Forrest replied. "I always knew PowerPoint would be useful for something."

"So the guy is fighting his war with the Insurgents that is low key and doesn't add fuel to the fire?"

"Right. It's a new concept that the Marine Corps is trying to establish. They are working on FMFM1. It may not work in Iraq because the concept is too new and not sufficiently ingrained in the troops. I stumbled on a draft copy of their Field Manual and copied it simply because it made sense. Both Afghanistan and the forthcoming war with Iraq will probably be fought as Third Generation wars."

"That's a shame."

"It is a shame, but an Insurgency is well established in Afghanistan so they'll do to us what they did to the Russians."

The invasion of Iraq began on March 20, 2003. After several battles in the manner of Third Generation war, Bush declared the war won on May 1, 2003. Boy was he ever wrong. By the time of that declaration, Jack had delivered all 30 cords of firewood, 29 of hardwood and one of softwood, by agreement, for starting fires in our stove.

Joanne gave my shotgun ammo to Marion and Jack along with 1,000 rounds of 147gr surplus, 1,000 rounds of the 168gr Hornady and 500 rounds of 9mm Lawman. She suggested that Jack buy Marion 500 rounds of Gold Dot 124gr +P. Jack told me that he hadn't had any luck on getting M136s or M72s, but he was still looking.

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 17

Based on Joanne and my discussions, I added three things to our planned 2003 garden, acorn and butternut squash and cucumbers. I got Moms recipe for bread and butter pickles from Bob's wife Mary and Joanne had her mother's recipes for dill pickles and sweet pickles. Each recipe called for a different variety of cucumbers so we had six rows of cucumbers and four rows of squash. I planted the same number of hills of potatoes but doubled the number of pepper pants, plum tomato plants and onion sets.

With school out, the first free day we had Joanne went riding, spending about four hours on each horse. Two days later, without the training we discussed, I went riding for the first time. My head was ~8 feet off the ground and I prayed the horse wouldn't throw me. Joanne hadn't ridden out all of the spunk, but I managed to stay in the saddle. I was petrified when we went into a full gallop, but hung in there and didn't show any fear. Over the course of the summer of 2003 we went riding many times and swapped horses a few times. Joanne finally acclaimed me to be accomplished.

With the small addition of fertilizer, the garden out produced the previous season by a wide margin. We gave Jack and Marion a full bag of onions and two bags of potatoes. I told him if they ran out, we had plenty. We even gave Bob and Jill potatoes and some of the pickles. The three families each got 5 acorns and 1 butternut squash. That's about all we accomplished before school started for another year.

We froze the squash following directions I found on the internet. The squash was cut up, blanched in boiling water for about 5 minutes and chilled in ice water before being added to the freezer. We found that the maximum time we could store potatoes and onions was about six months. At that stage we canned some and froze some. The potatoes seemed to do ok cut, blanched and frozen as french fries. The onions and potatoes both did well in home canned stew. We bought carrots and celery to add to the home canned stew. The frozen onions seemed to get soggy, but worked ok in cooked dishes. This year we only bought a side of beef and one hog, processed and wrapped. The quantities of extra bacon, sausage, ham and chicken seemed to be about right and we bought the same quantities, but changed the ratio to 80% breast quarters.

We ate well but didn't over eat and I dropped another two pounds over the summer and Joanne dropped one. The only liquor I had to replace was the 1800 and Grand Marnier but I added a new drink, Cognac. It was about mid-line, VSOP. About four nights a week we either had wine with our meal, a cocktail before or an after dinner drink. We got into a routine of spending one night a week with Jack and Marion.

Jack and Marion were struggling and she took a low paying job while Jack reinvented himself and harvested firewood. The extra income put them from just getting by to comfortable, given Marion's talent of squeezing a nickel until the buffalo pooped and selling the poop as manure. Marion had developed a taste for Margaritas, the ordinary kind with Cuervo, triple sec and fresh lime juice. Jack continued to nurse his Single Barrel to the point of being stingy and serving Black Label, except for special occasions. On the

special occasions, he'd drag out the Single Barrel and the Cuervo 1800 and Grand Mariner.

Marion had become an accomplished shooter and took her Browning money and added glass to her Loaded, the same as Joanne had. They bought a full 1,000 round case of Gold Dot 124gr +P and two cases of 124gr Lawman for practice. Jack bought an M1014 from someone he knew in Logistics and then switched to the same shotgun ammo we used. With hands too small for a Para pistol, he was shopping but hadn't come up with a replacement.

"Marion told me she's saving up for a Super Match with all the trimmings. She explained that meant a Nightforce 8-32x56mm mil dot scope, a Harris bipod, the stainless barrel with the Marine Camo stock and a FA762S-BC-SA."

"Did you tell her what the package would cost?"

"I sure did, but she'd already looked it up and knew she was approaching five grand. She bought a threaded barrel for her Browning and got a suppressor. She's just waiting on the tax stamp. She mentioned someplace on the net, 44mag dot com, that has new, current US issue M14 magazines in both 20 round and 25 round capacities."

"I'll look into that. I wouldn't mind having a few extra magazines for our rifles. It's about time we ordered more ammo and I'll keep my eyes open for any deals. Jack is still looking for the rockets. He did manage to find more smoke grenades... hand not 40mm. Jack said he could get me an AG36 grenade launcher for my G36 rifle and I gave him the go ahead."

"We'll be in good shape if Great Britain or Mexico invades the US."

"Yes we will, but don't suggest something like that even as a joke. History has a way of repeating itself. I did some reading while I was in the Army and one guy appealed to me, George Santayana. Two things stuck out. *Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it* and *Only the dead have seen the end of war.*"

"The name sounds Spanish."

"He was a Spaniard who lived most of his life in the US. I didn't mean to wax and wane philosophical. You've noticed that even though we won Iraqi Freedom, we're still fighting and racking up casualties and we aren't having any better luck in Afghanistan than the Russians."

"I understand now what you were talking about when you shared that piece about Fourth Generation war. And, you were right; we're fighting what amounts to a Third Generation war."

“The three classical levels of war – strategic, operational and tactical – still exist in Fourth Generation war. But all three are affected and to some extent changed by the Fourth Generation. One important change is that while in the first three generations, strategy was the province of generals; the Fourth Generation gives us the *strategic corporal*. Especially when video cameras are rolling, a single enlisted Marine may take an action that has strategic effect.”

“It’s still boots on the ground isn’t it?”

“It is, but it depends on how you step. That was clearly laid out in the example I showed you. Much of the work on that draft manual was done by William S. Lind, a paleoconservative. Journalist Thomas E. Ricks in *The Atlantic Monthly* asserted that Lind’s rhetoric differs from what Ricks’ calls *standard right-wing American rhetoric of the ’90s* because Lind suggests that the *next real war we fight is likely to be on American soil*.”

“I don’t know if I agree with that. It wouldn’t be a *real war* because we’d be the insurgents. Jack and you were professional soldiers, but Marion and I can hold our own. I wonder if they ride.”

“Going to form the Seventh Cavalry?”

“Nah, Custer didn’t leave the Seventh with a good reputation. Clarence is always talking about reforming the Tenth Cavalry.”

“Who is Clarence?”

“Oh, Clarence is a character in a series of Patriot Fiction stories written by TOM, the guy from Palmdale. So far his stories revolve around The Three Amigos, him and two AA buddies. Fleataxi hung that handle on the three guys.”

“Fleataxi?”

“He’s another writer from eastern Nevada. Apparently he likes dogs, hence the handle. He wrote a series called the *North to Alaska Series*.”

“That doesn’t sound like it has anything to do with Patriot Fiction.”

“It doesn’t. It started off with a guy who was stranded on a small lake in Alaska. It tells how he managed to survive due to good luck and his skills. He found an old trapper’s cabin and a black powder rifle... you’ll just have read it if you’re interested. It’s on my computer as a Word and a pdf file.”

“How did you get a pdf file?”

“There is an add-in for Office 2003 that allows you to print the file as a pdf file. I converted everything I had to pdf format.”

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“David, Jack. How many cords of firewood do you think you’ll need this coming year?”

“Let’s say ten, is that enough or too many.”

“It’s about right. I have several customers who have placed orders. I have 50 cords available. It’s all hardwood and I’m matching the market price, except for you. You can still have it for two hundred a cord.”

“Sure Jack bring it anytime.”

Jack could have sold ice to Eskimos. The going price was \$175 a cord but he made it sound like I was getting a *deal*. I went along with it because it was only money, of which we weren’t short, and he had to be desperate to scam me. However when he delivered the last half cord, of soft wood, he had a *present* for me, a carton of five M72A3s. The A3 was the upgrade to the variant used in Vietnam with safety upgrades.

“How much Jack?”

“Oh, no charge.”

“That’s ok; I already paid for them didn’t I?”

“Just what they cost me, \$50 each. They’re old, from around ’81 or ’82 and I got two crates. If you want the other two cartons, it will cost you five hundred.”

“Why didn’t you just charge me market price on the firewood and sell me the rockets? It would have amounted to the same amount of money and you wouldn’t have scamming me on the firewood on your conscience.”

“Sorry. Marion is like a driven woman these days. She got a suppressor for her Hi-Power and bought a Super Match with bipod and that Marine Corps Camo stock. Then, she bought a Nightforce 8-32x56mm mil dot scope. Finally she bought a Surefire FA762S-BC-SA and had it installed. I have to check the serial numbers to make sure I have my rifle rather than hers.”

“Does she have night vision?”

“That’s next and she’s been nagging me to find her an AN/PVS-27.”

“Tell her to save up her money; I bought Joanne one wholesale. Now, that was seven grand, but it’s not stolen.”

“Misappropriated.”

“Yeah, whatever, it was quite the stink as I remember.”

“You would remember, wouldn’t you?”

“Look Jack, it’s not a big deal. Joanne or I can buy one for Marion and she can pay us back in installments. You should be fair about it and pay for the mount. Do you remember how you praised her at that housewarming party? You put some spunk in your wife that had been missing for a very long time or I miss my guess. Both Joanne and I saw her reaction to what you said. After she got over being shocked, she cried. They were probably tears of joy that you appreciated her for her. I bet things have been different since, haven’t they?”

“Well, she has been warmer but she has this independent streak that driving me nuts.”

“Support her, Jack, don’t fight it. I find it works very well in our marriage.”

“David, I get the idea that Joanne and you have been married for years. Why would I get that impression?”

“I suppose, in a way, we were. All that was missing were the rings and ceremony. But I didn’t tell you that.”

“We already figured that part out.”

“We dated in High School and after graduation, I went into the Army and she went off to college. When she returned home to Mountain Home to teach, she told Jill and Jill wrote me. We picked up where we left off, but she had that injury from being thrown and trampled and there wasn’t a risk of pregnancy so we took it to the limit.”

“And you took leave two or three times a year to see her.”

“Exactly.”

“A long distance non-marriage marriage?”

“Hard to put in words, is it not?”

“Yeah. I couldn’t explain it to save my soul, so I’m just going to drop it. If Joanne and you want to buy Marion a MUNS, go ahead and I will get a mount installed on me. She’ll have to pay you two for the MUNS from what she earns.”

“Don’t forget to bring the remainder of the crate of LAWs.”

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 18

Joanne and my love affair brought to mind the theme from *Mondo Cane*.

*More than the greatest love the world has known,
This is the love I'll give to you alone,
More than the simple words I try to say,
I only live to love you more each day.
More than you'll ever know,
My arms long to hold you so,
My life will be in your keeping,
Waking, sleeping, laughing, weeping.
Longer than always is a long, long time,
But far beyond forever you'll be mine.
I know I never lived before,
and my heart is very sure,
No one else could love you more.*

I'd found the lyrics on the internet and copied them. The song predated our High School romance, but I'd heard it on an oldies station and when I had access, copied the lyrics. Although recorded by many artists, my favorite was the Bobby Darin recording. He died during my first hitch and a local DJ played the song every night to close his program. (True, with a long explanation, KIOA and the DJ was Dic Youngs.)

Tonight I decided on chicken and noodle casserole. Even a small batch would leave leftovers I could eat for lunch the next day. By now, since I did most of the cooking during the school year, I had adopted the practice of adding to the shopping list whenever I moved a package from out STS to the pantry. During the day, I'd make one pot of coffee and in the evening, we'd drink tea. Joanne the Earl Grey and me anything but; I liked the Earl Grey, occasionally, but only occasionally and often just drank Lipton. Bigelow sold the teas by the case and when Joanne learned that, she stocked up... six cases of Earl Grey to one case of each of the others.

Jack came through with the rest of the firewood and the partial crate of LAWs. I gave him the two thousand for the firewood and five hundred for the LAWs. After discussing the matter with Joanne, I bought the MUNS which she gave to Marion, after explaining the terms. We didn't really care how long it took Marion to pay us back, but a couple just doesn't give seven grand away.

The original Gatling gun was invented during 1861-62. The lack of metallic cartridges caused it to see little use during the Civil War. Eventually, it was adopted by the US military when metallic cartridges became available. Chambered in various calibers, the Army settled on the .45-70 in later years. The black powder .45-70 screened the opposition due to the gun smoke and it wasn't until smokeless powders were developed that the gun came into its own. It was used during the Spanish American war and was present when Teddy charged San Juan Hill. The military discontinued use in 1911.

I bring that up because I read TOM's first story, *The Ark*. There was nothing wrong with the concept of a 12 gauge Gatling gun except the recoil had to be tremendous. A 12 gauge is .729 caliber or about 18.5 millimeters which is close to a Vulcan cannon. It would have needed extremely heavy duty mounts. A magazine holding 50 rounds would have been about 3' long so maybe he had his friend build some drum magazines. The Gatling gun was capable of ~200 rounds-per-minute but call it 150 due to magazine changes. Gatling was the first person to use an electric motor on the gun and it had a rate of fire of ~1,500 r-p-m.

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As I've described our armories, the one thing that should be apparent is the lack of crew served weapons. The Army could have crew served weapons because they had the troops. There were only two of us, four if one counted Jack and Marion, and we had to be as mobile as transportation and our physical abilities allowed. My bad knees figured strongly in that equation.

So... rather than get any other breed of livestock, we transformed the 3 stall garage into a 4 stall horse barn and bought a second pair of Andalusian geldings, these were 5 year olds, from the same breeder. The approach to the tack was the same as the first time and we stopped on the way home and bought the extra tack, two more ropes and 4 more ascenders.

It turned out that Marion was originally raised on a Missouri farm and knew how to ride. Jack had ridden some growing up in Phoenix, but horses are an expensive proposition. First comes the feed and second comes shoeing them 8 or 9 times a year. Add to that having the vet check them over twice a year or more often. But, they were Andalusians, a powerful, and expensive, breed.

Knowing as I did that Jack and Marion didn't have any single action revolvers or lever action rifles we even sprung for those and the ammo that went with them. For all of our spending, we had more money now than we'd had in the beginning. It was a combination of things; the estate and insurance, conservative MMA managers and our continuing frugality. We got propane, diesel and gasoline once a year, when the prices seemed to be bottoming out. We frequently filled the holes in our STS with sale items and most of our clothing took the form of Christmas or birthday presents. Did Forrest Gump's mama ever say that *a cheapskate is as a cheapskate does*? Being frugal was an ingrained habit that we couldn't or wouldn't break.

◦

Two years into Iraqi Freedom and three years into Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan, Bush had somehow managed to get reelected. Ohio had the hanging chads for the 2004 election, so to speak. The Democrats couldn't pick a non-controversial candidate to save their soul. This election it had been *Band-Aid* John Kerry, a pal of *Hanoi* Jane.

Although only slightly less controversial, the outcome didn't receive the challenges of 2000. Methinks that come 2008, the Democrats will win most of or the whole ball of wax.

And no, I don't know who Joanne voted for. You'll have to remember she's a pistol packing Math teacher, so you guess. Bush let the Assault Weapons Ban sunset and my sense of it is that that got him more than a few votes. Neither Joanne nor I belonged to high profile organizations like the NRA or GOA and some of our firearms inspections were of the no notice type hence we always had the registered items in our possession and had none of the unregistered weapons in sight. Yes, I'd taken Joanne's advice and concealed the blast door behind a sliding cabinet where we stored spices and the tea.

Since we could do it, we continued to purchase LTS, this time from Nitro Pak, two years' worth at a time. We tried their sampler and it had more appeal than the foods from Walton Feed. We reduced the garden back to close its original size but continued to grow squash. We'd returned to a single bag of onions divided between us and Jack and Marion. We also cut the potatoes to the amount that would supply Jack and Marion and us for six months.

When we noticed that some of the meat was getting a little freezer burned, we bought a seal-a-meal and used up most of what we had before reordering and sealing the new meat in an additional layer of protection. There are only a couple of ways to really prevent freezer burn, extra protection or sharp freeze the food and maintain it at -60° in a relatively high moisture atmosphere. One of the other things people can do to reduce freezer burn is buy freezers with manual defrost because they're more temperature stable. Our freezers had manual defrost.

Christmas of 2005 had its blessings. Our gold and silver investments had reached an all-time high of ~\$500 for gold and \$9 for silver. Joanne had her \$6,000 face of junk silver plus her parent's \$3,000 face of junk silver. It totaled right at 6,435 ounces at \$9 or close to fifty-eight thousand. My thousand ounces were another nine thousand. We didn't have as many ounces of gold but ounce for ounce it was worth 55 times as much and put us into six figures of liquid assets. On paper... we had no intention of selling it anytime soon. Our combined net worth was close to seven figures.

After some subtle and not too subtle hints during the summer of 2005, I ordered a Tac-50 with the Nightforce 12-42x56mm mil dot scope, 8 extra magazines, the McCann night vision rail, a Jet Titanium suppressor and the AN/PVS-27 Magnum Universal Night Sight and 4,000 rounds of Hornady 750gr A-MAX Match. The cost of the ammo was breathtaking despite the huge discount I got, over \$16,000! I also bought two sets of the parts kits, just in case. I didn't add it up, but it probably came to thirty grand, or close enough it didn't matter.

We had talked about fostering at an earlier time and it finally came to pass. After a long wait, we were approved for one foster child. It was, after all, a two bedroom house. However, the first child available wasn't a single child but twin boys. It was easy enough

to move the queen sized bed to the shelter into a quickly added room addition, the last space on that wall, and to buy twin beds with two dressers and a pair of beds. We also bought a pair of laptop computers and desks.

The boys, Sean and Colin O'Brien, aged 13, moved in during Christmas vacation 2005. We gave them the laptops as Christmas presents in a save our butt move. The boys needed clothes and with the post-Christmas sales we outfitted them with good clothes at a reasonable price. We're talking skin out here, everything they had belonged in a rag bin. The circumstances of their needing fostering were really sad. Their father was doing 25 to life for murder and their mother was a lush and a prostitute.

The lady with Child Services brought the boys out to inspect their new home to see if it met with their approval and to meet us to see if we met with their approval. At least that's how I saw it. Joanne said it was also to see if the boys met with our approval. As far as I was concerned it was simply a matter of them meeting with her approval, she dealt with teens on a daily basis. The last time I'd dealt with teens on a daily basis was during my second hitch where I was a DI for three years. And after, occasionally, with new recruits who needed to be straightened out.

Thank God the boys were fraternal twins and not identical twins. It would have been very difficult, at first, to call Sean, Sean and Colin, Colin. I mostly did it by height in the beginning, Sean was taller. With the boys in our lives, we set aside shooting, for the moment. We also added a pistol cabinet to our bedroom walk-in closet. Effective with Sean and Colin moving in, we limited ourselves to carrying our backup pieces. Joanne carried the PPK in her purse and I carried the Warhawg in an ankle holster.

I had to tell, rather than give, Joanne her major Christmas present, the Tac-50 and all the accoutrements. It was sitting in her gun rack in the armory in its full glory with suppressor and MUNS mounted. She was very pleased and showed it.

As I thought about it, we were 52 and the boys 13. Theoretically, time wise, we could have been the boys' parents because some women have been known to have a first child at 39-40. It was unusual to say the least, but theoretically possible. All we could do with the boys would be to make our best effort. And, as I thought about firearms in relation to the boys, I realized that we had Joanne's Loaded and Marion had a Loaded. Maybe a little dickering was in order. It would let Marion off the hook on the MUNS by the amount the Loaded and scope had cost her and it wouldn't be that difficult to make sure both Loadeds were similarly equipped, just time, some money and so forth.

I picked up a pair of 9422s, a pair of Hi-Powers and a pair of 590A1s. Yeah it's nice to be able to spend money when you want. The problem with that was a significant portion of the wealth was in the cabinets (safes) in the armory and it would really have to be something special to cash in some of the precious metal. We're not Silas Marner and we didn't hoard gold for the sake of hoarding. Then again, maybe we were cast in his shadow. Old habits are hard to break. I'd broken them with regard to Joanne, to an ex-

tent. With the boys in our lives, it remained to be seen just how much further they'd be broken.

"Boys, Joanne and I have discussed it and we will give you an allowance for performing some chores."

"Lincoln freed the slaves."

"Lincoln is dead and he actually didn't free the slaves. Be that as it may, the chores are simple. We have four horses and they need to be fed and cleaned up after. We have a wood box that needs to be kept full during the winter months and someone has to take the trash out to the burn barrel. You can both work with the horses and take turns between the wood box and trash. The allowance you will receive will be yours to spend as you see fit, subject to minor limitations. No cigarettes, no booze and no drugs will be permitted."

"How much were you thinking of giving them David?"

"I'm not certain, more than I got when I was their age."

"The horses are a seven days a week chore so make that \$1 a day. The wood and trash aren't that much work so make the total \$10 per week."

"Ten dollars?"

"Well, it's not 1966 when you were 13. And ask yourself, did you really have chores?"

"A few, but not many; ok, ten dollars provided they do all their chores timely. Otherwise I may deduct a dollar when they don't do as asked."

"Explain it to them and take them out to the garage and show them how to do the chores by doing them yourself."

She shouldn't have had to tell me that. Effective leaders always lead by example. So was that what I'd become, a leader? When I thought about it, that was what I was for the boys, an example of how one conducted oneself. So, I got the boys and asked them to follow me to the garage where I first fed the horses, showing them how much hay and grain to put out and then got the wheelbarrow and shoveled the manure. After dumping the manure, I got some straw and replaced the bedding.

Next they followed me as I filled the wood carrier and made two trips refilling the wood box. Finally, I took the trash to the burn barrel where I admonished that only an adult would be responsible for burning the trash. It took less than 30 minutes to do it by myself and I indicated the two of them could probably do it in 15 minutes.

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 19

Then I explained the pay, \$1 per day for the horses and 50¢ a day, six days a week on the trash and firewood. I further explained that the horses needed attention twice per day and it was only really 50¢ for each time they took care of the horses. They agreed that the chores weren't oppressive and I didn't bother to explain the possibility of deducts. I'd save that for the future and could use it first as a warning and finally implement it if necessary.

Joanne managed to get the boys enrolled in the Mountain Home school system in Middle School, 8th grade. The boys would ride to and from school with her and she adjusted her commute by ten minutes to reflect the same. The Child Services worker had provided the boys' transcripts, making the task less onerous. Considering the environment they'd been raised in, the transcripts were better than I hoped.

"Boys you will be attending school in Mountain Home when school resumes. You will be riding with me and that means you'll be getting up early and getting home slightly later than if you rode a bus. With that in mind, I'm setting your bedtimes for 9:00 initially. If you don't get enough sleep, we can change to 8:30 and even 8:00, if necessary."

"That's not fair."

"It's fair. What isn't fair is life but we can't change the past, only look to the future. That's effective tonight so you can get into the habit of early to bed, early to rise."

"When can we ride the horses?"

"Do you know how to ride?"

"No but..."

"We'll get you lessons and then you can ride the Andalusians. These are big, powerful horses and they aren't for the amateur or first time rider."

"Patton rode them."

"George S. Patton was a Cavalry officer. He wasn't an amateur or first time rider. The horse he was shown riding in the movie was either an Andalusian or Lipizzaner. We'll try to get the lessons completed in time for summer. Speaking about summer, you'll have a chance to earn a small additional allowance. We grow a garden each year, although I suspect it will be slightly larger this coming year. You will both hoe the garden and help me with the canning. It looks like we're going to be canning more in quarts than pints from now on."

"Boys, you heard me tell that they would be no booze. We have a bar and a refrigerator that contains beer and soft drinks. We have two choices here; one, I can lock the bar

and refrigerator and keep soft drinks in the kitchen refrigerator or I can leave them unlocked and trust you. What say you?"

"You talk funny," Sean observed. "We won't bother it because both Mom and Dad were lishes. But if you don't trust us, lock it."

"No, it will remain unlocked based on your word that you won't get into the booze. We will make a point to keep soft drinks and iced tea in the kitchen refrigerator."

"Could we have lemonade too?"

"Sure. Is that in addition to the tea or instead of the tea?"

"In addition."

"I pick up some concentrate tomorrow. Summer is fresh lemon season."

"Do you remember the song from when we were kids?"

"Which song?"

*When I was just a lad of ten, my father said to me,
"Come here and take a lesson from the lovely lemon tree."
"Don't put your faith in love, my boy", my father said to me,
"I fear you'll find that love is like the lovely lemon tree."*

*Lemon tree very pretty and the lemon flower is sweet
But the fruit of the poor lemon is impossible to eat.
Lemon tree very pretty and the lemon flower is sweet
But the fruit of the poor lemon is impossible to eat.*

"Was that Peter, Paul and Mary?"

"It sure was. I love that song."

"The song has been recorded by Peter, Paul and Mary, Chad & Jeremy, The Kingston Trio, The Seekers, Bob Marley and The Wailers, Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass, Sandie Shaw, and Roger Whittaker. In 1965, Trini Lopez recorded the most successful version of the song which hit number twenty on the Hot 100 and number two on the Hot Adult Contemporary chart. That's probably the version you remember. As I recall, he didn't take his father's advice."

"No, he didn't. That didn't have anything to do with us, did it?"

“Not at all. It just wasn’t fair to you or me for that matter. We both had careers which we loved. You’re still working on your career and I probably would be if my knees hadn’t given out.”

“Well, God bless bad knees.”

“It was time, wasn’t it?”

“You could have retired at twenty.”

“And I’d have been better off and worse off for it. I’ve thought about it some and I don’t regret the decisions I made along the way.”

“We’re a couple of oddballs, aren’t we?”

“So some would say; but, we’re 3½ years wed and young.”

“With two 13 year old boys.”

“Absolutely amazing, isn’t it?”

“So some would say; but, we’re 3½ years wed and young,” she replied and winked.

I knew that wink. But we have to get the boys down and asleep before we got there.

“What’s that I smell?”

“Belgian waffles with clarified butter and heated Vermont Maple Syrup and bacon on the side.”

“Umm... oh I meant to tell you, I ordered 6 jars of House of Webster seedless Wild Blackberry Preserves and 6 jars of House of Webster Strawberry Preserves. I got them from Ozark Country Market in Heber Springs.”

“Where is Heber Springs?”

“It’s about straight south of Mountain Home.”

“Wouldn’t have been cheaper to pick it up?”

“With price of fuel what it is? No, it’s only one day by UPS. If we wanted to really stock up, it might different.”

“How much was it?”

“It cost six dollars a jar or seventy-two dollars plus shipping.”

“If we really like it, maybe you should call them and see if they offer a case price and how much of a discount it would be.”

“Check their website, they have hundreds of products. Don’t pass up something you like just because I didn’t buy it. I’ve always liked blackberry preserves and strawberry seems to be a universal favorite.”

The order came in and we enjoyed both the strawberry and blackberry preserves. So, much so that Joanne went to their website and looked through their offerings. The night before school started, she handed me a list.

“If you don’t have anything better to do, drive down to Heber Springs and buy what’s on this list.”

There were six more jars of blackberry and strawberry plus a dozen jars of blueberry and the same of boysenberry plus some of their butters and so forth. I just hoped it kept. After I checked on the horses to make sure the boys had tended to them, I got the map out and headed to Heber Springs. It was exactly 105 miles, one way. And, they didn’t offer discounts, regardless of how much you bought. We wouldn’t need any jams, jellies, butter or preserves for a very long time. I also got a jug of blackberry syrup, to give it a try. Vermont Maple Syrup was famous but Ozark Wild Blackberry Syrup was an unknown quantity.

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As we passed into 2006, the wars still raged in far off Iraq and Afghanistan with no end in sight. We had both read Colin Powell’s *My American Journey*. It’s a shame he didn’t run in 2000, he’d have never gotten us in Iraq and Afghanistan was a tossup. He was the Chairman while I was over there, but I think that Cheney more ran the show than he did. Joanne for sure believed that and she wasn’t shy about saying so.

So now, instead of Powell in his second term as President, we have Junior and Cheney and I’m not so sure they even like each other. Cheney and Schwarzkopf oversaw planning for what would become a full-scale US military operation. According to General Colin Powell, Cheney *had become a glutton for information, with an appetite we could barely satisfy. He spent hours in the National Military Command Center peppering my staff with questions.*

Back to 2006, everything was happening one might expect when the Vice President shot a hunting companion in February down in Texas. It wasn’t even safe to walk behind him! And, it seemed like every time we turned around, he was in the hospital getting more treatment for his bad heart. His former multi-pack-a-day cigarette habit was doing him in. We had our fingers and toes crossed; it looked like the Democrats were going to take Congress in the fall election which would make a Democrat in the line of succession.

So far, a month into it the boys were doing just fine and had some money in their pockets that seemed to be burning holes in their jeans. You know, \$50 is a lot of money when you've had no allowance since who knew when. It was too cold for riding lessons, but Joanne had them signed up for the first warm day when horses would be available.

"We have a problem David."

"What problem?"

"There are four of us now and only four horses."

"What's the big deal, a person can only ride one horse at a time."

"That's true but the original thinking on buying a second pair of geldings was having horses for Jack and Marion to ride."

"The garage is full."

"I know; we're going to have to expand it to six stalls. I figure that will hold 8 horses easily enough."

"We should have built a barn."

"Can we?"

"I suppose we could convert the garage we built as a substitute barn into a storage building and build a real barn. But if we do that, how many stalls will you want?"

"Twelve."

"What, they're going to rotate stalls?"

"Expansion room, just in case, you know."

"Just in case what?"

"In case I can talk you into more horses. You'll have to agree that we should have six. And you'll have to agree that you can't work a horse for a full day... you need to have a remount. So if we have six horses and six remounts, that makes 12. I have enough saved up for four more geldings and you can pay for the barn. Simple, no?"

"I'll have to check my MMA and my savings account."

"Don't worry, you have enough."

“And when do they start building the barn?”

“Monday.”

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 20

“And when do we get the horses?”

“After the barn is finished and if I buy eight they’ll deliver, no charge. That will save us lots of money.”

“How do figure that?”

“We have a two horse trailer, right?”

“Yes, so?”

“You were complaining about the cost of fuel. We’d have to make four trips to pick up eight horses.”

“I don’t really remember actually agreeing to any of this.”

“You did agree that we need two more horses so the boys have horses too, right?”

“Uh, right.”

“And you did agree that a person can’t ride a horse a full day, right?”

“Uh, right.”

“And you did say the garage could be converted to a storage room, right?”

“Uh, right.”

“And you did say we should have built a barn, right?”

“Uh, right.”

“And you do trust me when I say you have enough money, right?”

“Uh, right.”

“So they begin construction on Monday.”

“WAIT A MINUTE! Have you ever seen that old Abbott and Costello routine, *Who’s on first?*”

“Of course, do you feel a little bit like Lou Costello?”

“What’s on second.”

“And I don’t know is on third.”

“I think I’ve been had.”

“No dear, that comes later after the boys are asleep. I actually have the full price of eight horses, fifty thousand.”

“Remind me to have them install fire sprinklers in the barn and the garage.”

Twelve horses valued at an average price of \$6,000 each was \$72,000. We could store hay in the loft, but I figured most of the space in garage would be taken up with COB and straw. Then there were the extras, saddle bags, scabbards, pommel bags climbing ropes and those ascenders. Now you couldn’t have pommel bags with empty holsters so that was another three to four grand per horse for revolvers and about fifteen hundred for the rifles. And didn’t I hear that Winchester was closing up shop? I’d have to get those bought quick.

Well, if Joanne could spend a fortune on horse flesh, I was willing to send a fortune on 94s in .45 Colt, 1895s in .45-70 and I’d only needed enough for Sean and Colin. It appeared that at the minimum I need to buy 4 rifles and 10 revolvers to fully equip the boys. We’d already equipped Jack and Marion, remember? That would give each person a revolver in the three barrel lengths and a pair of 5½” for the pommel bags. It would also give each of the boys a model 94, a model 9422 and a Marlin 1895 Cowboy.

While I could without doubt buy cowboy loads and full power loads, I heard about Buffalo Bore and their high power loads. It would probably pay to cover all of the bases. As much as I hated the thought, I would sell gold if I had to, to get the Winchesters. A quick check on my MMA balance and savings balance erased that thought.

By the time Joanne had me rototilling the garden, the barn was completed and the timothy moved over to the loft. A load of straw filled one garage stall from the floor to the ceiling and the COB was stored in two grain hoppers in the second stall. We reserved the third stall for the tack and every piece was identified by the name of the horse to which it belonged. (Ear tattoos.)

The garden was only slightly larger, with the same crops as the previous year except for additional onions, potatoes and green beans. Beginning this year we’d pack in quart jars and then in pints if we ran out of quarts.

Rather than continuing buying lids, we switched to the Tattler lids. The upfront investment was substantial, but they claimed several years use from the lids and also sold replacement rubber rings. Joanne said one of the other teachers had used them with good results.

Sean and Colin, our Irish twins, did help with garden for the extra money Joanne added. While they'd had few opportunities to spend their accumulated allowances, each had a goal to buy what they wanted when they were old enough, provided they could pay for it. Who doesn't remember their first car? Mine was a '61 Mercury Comet with about 60,000 on the odometer that I got when I turned 16 in '69. Joanne had a '63 Ford Falcon, waiting until her eighteenth birthday in '71, our senior year. She and I decided to buy them each a fixer-upper and let them pay for the repairs, provided they agreed with our plan. And, with 8 additional horses, their allowances were increased to \$25 per week.

They had no more worries about having a decent meal on the table or good clothes to wear. We even bought them cowboy boots and hats for their birthday. Joanne worked the deal with Marion, allowing her to reduce the amount owed for the MUNS by what she'd paid for the Loaded and scope. After equipping Sean and Colin with eye protection and ear muffs, the four of us went to the range and began their education with the firearms.

We started with the 9422s and when they had those semi-mastered switched to the model 94s using cowboy loads and later full power loads. They now had rifles for their scabbards but weren't allowed to carry them just yet. We moved them to the Hi-Powers and spent a good month teaching them how to shoot and care for the pistols. And finally by late July, we had them shooting the 5½" Colts with cowboy loads.

They worked in the garden helping Joanne, with only an occasional *do I have to?* And they rubbed down the horses when needed, at a buck a head. They learned I was an easier touch than Joanne and that I really wasn't an easy touch. Every other weekend Jack and Marion would boat across the lake for a few hours of riding.

With Marion's income and Jack's firewood sales they were doing much better financially. We weren't burning nearly as much firewood as we were buying from Jack but it was stacked, tarped and held against *future needs*. It was no different than the food in the storage room off the shelter, our just in case food supplies. We added another 2 year supply from Nitro Pak covering the boys. And when we had the chance we filled the coal room with anthracite coal.

School resumed and the boys were now attending Mountain Home High School. But since their last names weren't Burns, they neatly sidestepped the fact that their foster mother was one of the teachers. Of course it didn't hurt that they had someone available to answer questions concerning their algebra homework.

For the first time in a long while, we hosted Thanksgiving, inviting my brother and sister and families plus Jack and Marion. I checked the liquor supplies and added bottles of 1800, Grand Marner, Hennessy VSOP, cases of Coors, Coors Light and MGD. I picked up any mixes I needed at Wal-Mart along with the soft drinks. When they put turkeys on sale, we bought a 22 pounder, several 12 pounders and a whole Cure 81 ham.

We spent the better part of a Saturday shopping for what we needed to put on the Thanksgiving feast and while we were at it filled the holes in our STS. I haven't mentioned it for a while, but that was still a quarterly process, just as adding two years of LTS was an annual occurrence. It was the same with ammunition, always replacing what we shot up with just a bit more. With two of us shooting the fifty caliber, our supply was divided into 600 rounds of Mk 211 MP and 3,000 rounds of A-MAX per rifle but we were working on replacing the Hornady and were up to 3,500 rounds each.

The .50 caliber ammo was expensive, generally around \$5 per round. But what good is a .50 caliber rifle if you aren't proficient with it? On a typical day on the range, we'd each expend 50 rounds and order a full case of 200 rounds to replace it. The 7.62 and 5.56 were the same; we'd wait until we'd expended half a case before ordering a replacement case. I suppose there is such a thing as having too much ammo, but our practices were rebuilding the supply of .50 cal slowly and increasing the 5.56 and 7.62 even more slowly.

We eventually stopped buying the cowboy loads and stuck with the full power loads. We should have kept the 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " shotgun shells for when we broke the boys in on the shotguns.

We started them on reduced recoil loads, move to full power loads and eventually let them try the Magnum Express loads. They were growing up, they adjusted. We let them shoot up the reduced recoil loads and full power loads and doubled our supply of the 3" shells to 8 cases of Brenneke slugs, 16 cases of 00 buckshot and 16 cases of No. 4 buckshot, storing it in hermetically sealed containers with desiccants.

Thanksgiving went off without a hitch. There was Merlot for those that drank and sparkling cider for those that didn't drink. The turkey was done to a turn and the Pepperidge Farms dressing was a hit. There was pistachio nut salad, cranberry salad, sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, jellied cranberry sauce, ham, turkey gravy and ham gravy, the ever present green bean casserole and squash. There was also a condiments tray with carrot sticks, celery sticks, green and black olives and three kinds of pickles. Nobody went away hungry.

After everyone napped, the leftover turkey and ham were sliced and the remaining salads set out with the condiments and everyone had a *snack*. Unsure of how late the festivities would last, Jack and Marion drove rather than take a boat across the now cold lake.

The dining room table sat eight. The youngsters were set up at the kitchen table which was pulled out of the shelter with the last three sitting at the regular kitchen table adding one folding chair. Since the boys had come, we could no longer eat at the breakfast nook and ate at the dining room table.

We had about half of the ham left, a small amount of turkey, dressing and mashed potatoes and gravy. Joanne had cooked a lesser amount of the green bean casserole to

avoid having that left over. We could make a meal out of the turkey and trimmings and have ham sandwiches for a few days. Have you ever seen a teenager eat? They have two hollow legs and after eating wanted to go horse riding. It was cold and we had to tell them no. So while most everyone napped, they went down to the shelter and turned on the TV. I knew that shelter was good for something besides spending money on.

They had been in the armory, but I'd painted over the labels on the canisters and boxes and they had no idea what the unlabeled boxes held. They had only ever been allowed in the armory when either Joanne or I was present and that was to select a firearm and ammunition or return the cleaned firearm and the brass.

I didn't reload. Most of the ammo was boxer primed so it was collected and taken to the gun store in Mountain Home where he sent it out and had it reloaded to *Match* specs. Uncertain if it really was as advertised, we didn't shoot it. They say hind sight is 20/20; when we tried it, it was equal to any match ammo on the market. Shooting the ammo in Joanne's AC-556 with the target barrel showed it to be extremely accurate beyond 500 meters and she could shoot to 800 meters using an ACOG with a BDC mounted with A.R.M.S. throw-lever mount.

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"What are we giving them for Christmas?"

"I thought maybe clothes and the 9422s."

"Add the model 94s and we'll be in agreement. I've already explained Arkansas law about minors with handguns and they understand that they will only have a handgun with you or I present."

"Do you think they'll be ready to shoot the Loadeds come summer?"

"Don't you?"

"I do, that's why I asked."

"We don't always have to agree, you know."

"We don't always but we've been able to discuss the disagreement and come to a satisfactory resolution."

"Yeah, and there's no kissing and making up."

"What we do works and avoids the anger. We can kiss and make up any time."

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 21

“You just don’t get it. Sometimes a person needs to vent. It’s not so much the fight as the venting that naturally comes with a fight.”

“You want to vent? I’m here 24/7/365.”

“Don’t you ever want to vent?”

“In November I wanted to scream to the high heavens. Cheney has a bad heart and the Democrats took control of the House. Then on November 16th Nancy Pelosi was designated as Speaker of the House. Talking about liberal doesn’t come close to describing her. It’s a stretch, but what if Cheney had a fatal heart attack and before Bush appointed and/or the Senate confirmed a replacement, something happened to Bush?”

“So you do need to vent?”

“I don’t need to but sometimes I want to. Venting won’t change the facts of the subject of my frustration.”

“Do I frustrate you?”

“Sometimes, but it’s very seldom if at all; although we do have a barn and 12 Andalusians. But I raised my objections at the time so it’s a closed subject.”

“I forced them on you didn’t I?”

“What’s on second.”

“And I don’t know is on third. We need to test those recoiled ropes to see if they really feed to their full length without becoming tangled.”

“We’ll do that first chance we get. Next time we buy our quarterly STS we need to get two more units from Nitro Pak.”

“Six units, total?”

“Eventually I’d like to get it to 15 or 16 units, but that Nitro Pak stuff is so damned expensive compared to the Walton Feed stuff.”

“You get what you pay for, don’t you?”

“I hope so. I was actually thinking of trying a different supplier. For the price of two Nitro Pak units we could get four of Emergency Essentials’ units. I checked contents of both and think we might be happier with Emergency Essentials.”

“If you think that’s what we should do, then you should do it. If we ever need to use the food, we’ll probably use a little of each, starting with the STS and moving to whatever has the shortest storage time, like the NP items in the supplies from Nitro Pak.”

“Ok, I’ll do that, before I change my mind. You know, when I got out of the Army, I had little knowledge and no intention of becoming a survivalist/prepper or whatever the vogue term is now.”

“It’s still survivalist to the hard core group and prepper to those trying to maintain a low profile.”

“If it came down to a weapons exchange, what would be the most likely target in our area?”

“There are four, to the south Little Rock and to the west Wichita, Tulsa and Oklahoma City. Why do you ask?”

“It seems that Iran may be trying for the bomb. It began in the ‘50s with the Atoms for Peace Program. Later the Shah came to power and he approved plans to construct, with US help, up to 23 nuclear power stations by 2000. In March 1974, the Shah envisioned a time when the world’s oil supply would run out, and declared, *Petroleum is a noble material, much too valuable to burn ... We envision producing, as soon as possible, 23,000 megawatts of electricity using nuclear plants.*

“Iran had deep pockets and close ties to the West. US and European companies scrambled to do business in Iran. Bushehr would be the first plant, and would supply energy to the inland city of Shiraz. In 1975, the Erlangen/Frankfurt firm Kraftwerk Union AG, a joint venture of Siemens AG and AEG Telefunken AG, signed a contract worth \$4 to \$6 billion to build the pressurized water reactor nuclear power plant. Construction of the two 1,196 MWe, and was to have been completed in 1981.

“The joint stock company Eurodif operating a uranium enrichment plant in France was formed in 1973 by France, Belgium, Spain and Sweden. In 1975 Sweden’s 10% share in Eurodif went to Iran as a result of an arrangement between France and Iran. The French government subsidiary company Cogéma and the Iranian Government established the Sofidif (*Société franco-iranienne pour l’enrichissement de l’uranium par diffusion gazeuse*) enterprise with 60% and 40% shares, respectively. In turn, Sofidif acquired a 25% share in Eurodif, which gave Iran its 10% share of Eurodif. Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi lent 1 billion dollars (and another 180 million dollars in 1977) for the construction of the Eurodif factory, to have the right of buying 10% of the production of the site.

"President Gerald Ford signed a directive in 1976 offering Tehran the chance to buy and operate a US-built reprocessing facility for extracting plutonium from nuclear reactor fuel. The deal was for a complete 'nuclear fuel cycle'. At the time, Richard Cheney was the White House Chief of Staff, and Donald Rumsfeld was the Secretary of Defense.

The Ford strategy paper said the *introduction of nuclear power will both provide for the growing needs of Iran's economy and free remaining oil reserves for export or conversion to petrochemicals.*

“Then-US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger recalled last year, *I don't think the issue of proliferation came up.* However, a 1974 CIA proliferation assessment stated *If [the Shah] is alive in the mid-1980s ... and if other countries [particularly India] have proceeded with weapons development we have no doubt Iran will follow suit.*

“The Shah also signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with South Africa under which Iranian oil money financed the development of South African fuel enrichment technology using a novel *jet nozzle* process, in return for assured supplies of South African (and Namibian) enriched uranium. That's how Iran got a start on a nuclear program and now they have the Russians completing the reactor at Bushehr. That project started in '95.”

“Did you read that or take a class or something?”

“I read that somewhere, but don't ask me where. The thing about it is, that Ayatollah Ali Khāmenei who is charge over there issued a what, a fatwa, against the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons. Apparently what's his face, Ahmad-inejad, is pushing for a nuclear weapons program.”

“And eight becomes ten.”

“Now consider this... if Germany could build a reactor in Iran as they've built reactors in Germany, what is to prevent them from having an above top secret nuclear weapons program? The same applies to the Japanese; they have a bunch of reactors. Nobody would know for sure unless they tested a nuclear weapon. The US doesn't need to test nuclear weapons these days, so why would the Germans or Japanese need to test one, assuming they built one or some?”

“And ten becomes twelve.”

“Maybe thirteen; South Africa built about six nukes and later dismantled them so they have capability if nothing else.”

“How much earth covering is over the shelter?”

“There are ten feet of earth on top of 10 inches of concrete. And the walls are ten inches thick in the main shelter. You know those two pipes in the tunnel to the generator?”

“What about them?”

“I had a dickens of a time figuring out what they were there for. I finally figured it out. One pipe draws air from the main shelter for the generator engine and the second has an air pump that pulls air from the shelter to purify and cool the air in the generator room

which is exhausted through an overpressure valve to the surface. The guy thought of almost everything when he built it.”

“Except for concealing the blast door.”

“It wasn’t concealed when I bought this place but from the looks of the floor, he had something on metal rollers in front of the door. If you look closely, you’ll notice very faint wear marks on the concrete floor. What did you mean by eight becomes ten?”

“I was including North Korea.”

“Did they test a bomb?”

“Not that I know of, but in ’89 they began to build a nuclear reactor and processing facility near YongByon. Beginning in ’92 they blocked inspections by the IAEA, repeatedly and refused to reveal the amount of Plutonium in their possession. During early 2003, they announced they were withdrawing from the NPT although they never officially did so. I personally believe it’s just a matter of time until they test a nuclear weapon. So I included them when I added Iran.”

“You’re amazing. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, we make one hell of a team.”

“What’s that they say, *and she cooks too?*”

“Yes and you cook too.”

“They only have one problem; they can’t build an ICBM that works. But, they have SRBM and IRBMs. They could probably attack both South Korea and Japan.”

“If they do, they’ll get either TLAM-Ns or one or two D-5 Trident 2s.”

“You know, I suspect Kim Jong-il doesn’t really care.”

“And, that makes for a very dangerous adversary because he has nothing to lose.”

“I agree; Kim and Ahmadinejad are a matched set. I sure hope it doesn’t come to pass in our lifetimes.”

“Looking ahead, what do we plan to plant in the garden coming spring?”

“Another row of green bean bushes and everything else the same as this past year. Both Sean and Colin like green beans. We could stand a full beef and two hogs if we plan to buy ham and bacon as we have in the past. But, get half hams rather than one-third hams. And you’d better double the bacon and sausage. On the other hand, we could do three hogs and smoke two loins, the picnics and hams. It’s more expensive

raising two foster children than I imagined and it's just a good thing that the state pays as well as it does to cover the additional costs."

"What they pay barely covers the costs of food and clothing."

"If we had two of our own, the state wouldn't pay a dime. Where would that put us?"

"About where Jack and Marion are; barely comfortable."

"And we're squared away on firearms?"

"We are unless someone comes up with a short stroke gas piston (SSGP) M16. Those I'd love to have four of."

"Five point five six?"

"Unless they were also available in seven point six two and in that case four of each."

"You never know, it could happen in the not too distant future."

"That's possible. There are two new cartridges available that outperform the 5.56. They are the 6.5 Grendel and the 6.8 Remington SPC. I really hate the idea of getting involved in yet another cartridge. An upper with a SSGP is available for either cartridge but we don't have any A3 lowers. For those few times when burst or full-auto capability is useful, I lean towards full-auto rather than 3-round burst. But I'll keep my eyes open and maybe the guy who sold me the G36 might find a few that fell off the delivery truck."

"Will that AG-36 fit on these new rifles?"

"That might depend on what we buy. So far all we have is the M-79 and the AG-36. You know, now that I look back on it, I really should have taken the armed guard training. It might have helped me become a reserve deputy for Marion County, if they have reserves. Being a reserve deputy would have made most of our illegal weapons legal."

"I'm not sure either Marion County or Baxter County has reserve deputies."

"Be my luck to get called up to handle extra traffic and get involved in a shootout at some Mom and Pop where the thief only got thirty bucks from the cash register. It was just a lame brained idea about how to get some of our weapons classified as legal. I think I'd better leave well enough alone."

"Just so you know, I'll be retiring in 8 more years. I don't intend to work a day past age 62. And since my birthday comes during the school year, I will pull out at 61 plus. I have a pension and a Self-Directed Individual Retirement Arrangement I haven't mentioned."

"I should have done that too but we are pretty well set. How will we be set then?"

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 22

“Better than we are now. What are gold and silver up to?”

“Gold is running at six hundred and silver ten dollars.”

“Maybe I shouldn’t wait.”

“What goes up might come down. You should hold and buy more if you can; you can average your costs by dividing the value of your total holdings by your total investment should you need to sell some. The stock markets are starting to slump and that should raise gold and silver even higher. I’m still buying an occasional coin or two when I’m not spending my retirement on something else. Recently that’s been better since we have just about run out of things to buy, excluding expanding our LTS.”

“Are you stuck on the 6.5 and 6.8 cartridges?”

“Why?”

“H & K has a new SSGP rifle available in 5.56 and 7.62.”

“What do you know about them, if anything?”

“They’re based on the G36 like you have and come in various barrel lengths. The HK416 in 5.56 became available to Operators in 2004. If I recall correctly Delta Force was involved in the development. The HK417 is a scaled up HK416 chambered in 7.62. I take it you don’t follow some the tech sites describing when weapons are under development or released for issue.”

“No I don’t. Magazines?”

“They use a translucent polymer magazine. The 417 also uses a 50 round drum previously used on some H & K machine gun. Since they’re H & K, I doubt they’re inexpensive. However the 417 has an accurized 20” barrel available and the 416 has at least four barrel lengths available. The 416 accepts 20 and 30 round magazines plus the 100 round Beta C magazine.”

“Forget that, the Beta C magazines are highly overrated.”

“Anyway, if you’re interested, you could check with your class 3 dealer and see if he has them or can get them. One thing, you better plan on buying 4 in each caliber and the proprietary H & K magazines. We have all of those reloads and probably enough ammo for the weapons already on hand. If you buy eight rifles, you should plan on spending anywhere from twenty grand and up. You’ll probably want to go with that M320 grenade launcher. Both rifles accept suppressors. The twist rate on the 5.56 is 1:7 Right and the 7.62 1:11 Right. They’re safe, semi and full-auto. Finally, you should be able to get the

available barrel lengths but I don't recall if the barrels are quick change or available only as upper receivers."

"Hot damn, I knew someone would get their head out and produce a proper assault rifle. I assume they'll accept a selection of sights and they'd be the cat's meow. Have they been thoroughly tested?"

"Delta Force adopted them in 2004 and the Marine Corps are currently evaluating them as a replacement for the SAW. They use that cold forged barrel process that H & K is famous for and have an expected barrel life of 20,000-rounds."

"What the hell, what's another 8 NFA weapons. But at those prices Jack and Marion are on their own. I meant to ask, what's the deal on the Arkansas CCW?"

"Are you talking about the three handgun limit? I don't know. Maybe they think that no one should have more than 3 potential concealed weapons."

"You know where I'll be Monday morning."

"I did rather suspect that when I told you about them."

"I guess we're going to end up with the proper weapons regardless of the circumstances."

"One thing David, no crew served weapons. TOM uses a wheelchair and he's mentioned more than once that he had to get a *combat wheelchair*. All it involves is a wheelchair with a 600 pound weight limit because he ended up with more firearms than his regular 300 pound weight limit wheelchair could carry.

"There only six of us counting the boys plus Jack and Marion. Six weapons are better than one or two even if they're high capacity machine guns. One other thing; he complained in some of his stories that with a 20-round magazine inserted it was difficult to carry his Loaded in a scabbard. Eventually he figured out to carry it with a 5 round magazine and carry his spares in a Tac Force chest harness. Since he didn't have grenades, he could stuff 14 magazines in the harness but it was almost too heavy to carry."

"He rides?"

"From what I gather only one time. He ended up with the horse that the stable reserved for small children. On the trail ride, every time they ran the horses, his mount, Salina, who didn't even walk fast, took off in full gallop and he hasn't ridden since. But he made the mistake of telling the story to his two amigos and they harass him about it every chance they get."

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Yes, the rifles were available for military and law enforcement and yes, he could get the grenade launchers, polymer magazines and drum magazines and *they weren't cheap*. But this item he would only sell to military and law enforcement. I dug out my military ID and the floodgates opened until he noticed I was retired. After considering it for a while he agreed to get them but said we were walking a narrow line and he'd need a bit extra to compensate him for the risk. I couldn't get GSA pricing, I had to pay the MSRP. In retrospect, I should have gotten the Armed Security Guard License and set up a Limited Liability Corporation for additional class 3 firearms purchases.

The ATF made a no knock inspection. I laid the firearms and suppressors out on the dining room table, unloaded (I'd read *Unintended Consequences*) and chambers open. Jack had loaned me the Elite Iron suppressor for a few days and each weapon was accompanied with ATF documentation.

After the ATF inspection, which we passed, we had a conundrum. I solved it by going back to my friendly class 3 dealer and asked if it would be possible to get an unpapered Elite Iron or Jet Titanium suppressor. He said anything was possible; that money talked and bullshit walked and which did I want? I told him an Elite Iron and he said \$2,500, cash. I counted out 25 Ben Franklins and he handed me a box. It had *fallen of a truck* he claimed.

When I returned Jack's suppressor I explained that I kept the one in my name and got him an unregistered suppressor because of the looming ATF inspections. It would be worth the \$2,500 to not get caught without the registered suppressor. That evening I prepared pepper steak with rice. I'd only prepared it once before and Joanne seemed to really enjoy it so I decided to introduce it to the boys or vice-versa.

Time seemed to fly the spring, summer and fall of 2007. The faster it flew, the more the economy tanked. Finally the government was forced to step in and bailout several companies. And the more it tanked the more the price of precious metals rose. By the end of the year, gold was sitting near \$850 and silver just shy of \$15. The bailout included several very large brokerages that got caught when the housing bubble began to burst in 2007 and they had large amounts of sub-prime mortgage holdings. There was also the problem with something called derivatives.

Thanksgiving 2007 was a stay at home holiday and the boys voted for turkey. So, I pulled out a small one and got it thawing in the refrigerator in the shelter. This wouldn't be as elaborate as the 2006, all family, celebration. It would be turkey with stuffing, gravy and mashed potatoes, pistachio nut salad and jellied cranberry sauce. We had pretty fair amount leftovers and went with turkey sandwiches and the reheated mashed potatoes and dressing drowned in the reheated gravy. The relish tray this year had celery sticks and the three kinds of pickles with stuffed green olives.

Christmas saw the boys getting clothes and the 1895s. Joanne had enough Victoria Secret's baby dolls to last her a lifetime and I was good on underwear so we just bought

each other more western wear and new boots. Since most of our riding occurred during the summer, we bought straw hats all around.

The campaign for 2008 was heating up and, thank God, Dick Cheney hadn't died in office. But there was the Scooter Libby conviction hanging like an anvil over Bush and Cheney's heads. Hilary made a run along with an Illinois Senator Barack Hussein Obama, a black man (more of a heavy tan). In the primaries, she got the popular vote, but he got the delegates due to *voting irregularities*. The Republicans had a contest between McCain, Romney and Huckabee. McCain had nearly as many votes as the other two combined.

At the Conventions, Obama selected Joe Biden as his running mate and McCain selected Sarah Palin, the Governor of Alaska. We were shaking our heads, saying, *Sarah who?* Maybe the rest of the country was wondering too. Elected to Wasilla City Council in 1992 and mayor of Wasilla in 1996, in 2003, after an unsuccessful run for lieutenant governor, she was appointed Chairman of the Alaska Oil and Gas Conversation Commission, responsible for overseeing the state's oil and gas fields for safety and efficiency. The youngest person and first woman to be elected Governor of Alaska, Palin held the office from December 2006 until her resignation in July 2009 which should indicate who won in November, 2008, Obama and Biden.

We're getting fairly current here, the twins were juniors in High School, they each had a vehicle that had been restored enough to be safe and run. They were spending their free time restoring the interiors and exteriors of the pickups. When they went on dates, they borrowed my pickup and Joanne's pickup. We just never saw the need for a car and just kept adding on miles to our pickups.

Obama had campaigned on change and we found out that was his version of Hilarycare, remember that from '93? He wanted to bring the troops home but the status quo in Iraq and Afghanistan wouldn't permit that, yet.

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"I've never asked you who you voted for before, but you didn't vote for this guy, did you?"

"Wash your mouth out with soap and your mind for even having that thought. You didn't, I am sure."

"No, I voted for John McCain and what's her name. You know the gal that is linked to the Tea Party."

"Your mean Sarah Who?"

"She resigned as Governor of Alaska."

“Why?”

“I don’t know... maybe she had a bad hair day or wanted to spend time with her illegitimate grandchild.”

“Hey, it happens.”

“Not to candidates for the Vice Presidency it doesn’t.”

“I think that Sean is getting very interested in Crystal Green.”

“What about Colin?”

“Susan George.”

“I suppose I should have a talk with them.”

“What do you want know that you don’t already? They’re both responsible young men.”

“I hope so; they’re armed as well as we are now except their M1As are Loadeds and they don’t have Tac-50s.”

“At least they’ll be legal with their handguns on their next birthday. We should think about getting them leather for their birthdays.”

“What do you want to get?”

“How about we get them the Laredoan cross draw rigs, Paladins for the 7½” Colt and Bianchi holsters for the pistols. Do you think they need a backup pistol?”

“Not until they’re of legal age for a CCW. Let’s not get them started off on the wrong foot.”

“That’s fair enough. You have time to visit with them on the way to and from school, have they indicated what they might do when they graduate?”

“They want to attend The Coast Guard Academy.”

“They select based on merit. They must get 2,500 applicants a year and only select 400.”

“Their grades are good enough for them to be considered. Both have 4.0 grade point averages and are likely to be Co-valedictorians of their class.”

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 23

“That’s nine years of service; four at the Academy and five of active duty. What about their girlfriends?”

“What about them? They’re both planning on college. Crystal is going to go to ASU, Jonesboro and Susan to UA, Little Rock. Neither boy has indicated any interest in the University of Arkansas. I said the boys were very interested, not that they had found their life companions.”

“Shooting on Saturday?”

“I thought that Jack and Marion were coming over to go riding.”

“Sorry, I forgot. Shooting on Sunday afternoon?”

“Yes, I could use some time on my Super Match and the ammo is cheaper.”

“Gold hit \$1,000 yesterday.”

“Silver?”

“Down to \$13.”

“That’s 77:1. Either gold will go down or silver will go up. They tend to maintain a ratio of about 50:1, although I’ve seen it as low as 36:1. I think maybe it might be a time to look into more junk silver. I have enough for \$1,000 face value.”

◦

The boys graduated in 2010. Both boys had applied and had been accepted for The Coast Guard Academy. They left soon after graduation for the Swab Summer, essentially Basic Training. Sean had expressed an interest in Mechanical Engineering and Colin in Electrical Engineering, two of the eight fields of study the Academy offered. The boys seemed to have the smarts that their parents lacked.

The boys’ father had been moved to the Varner Unit after an undisclosed infraction in 2007. Their mother had disappeared and the Child Services worker suggested she may have gone to Little Rock. Pine Bluff is the headquarters of the Arkansas Department of Corrections and many prisons are located in that general area. Varner is a high security prison with Arkansas’ Super Max and male execution facility.

We hadn’t told the boys about their father’s move and wouldn’t unless they wanted to visit him. The subject of their mother and father were never brought up, to us. With them off to New London, summer returned to more like it had been before Christmas of 2005. We planted a smaller garden and sorted through the pint jars, checking for chipped lips

and discarding the few we found. We were able to find enough replacement jars at yard sales and the grocery stores to fill our needs.

We thought about selling the four oldest horses, but in the end, didn't. Instead, on the days when we were free, we went riding. We rode the 1st pair in the morning and the 2nd in the afternoon. The next time we rode, we'd ride the 3rd and 4th pair and after that the 5th and 6th pair, and repeat. When Jack and Marion came over to ride about every other weekend, we just advanced the horse rotation.

From what we could tell, under Arkansas law open carry was not permitted except on your own land or in your place of business. That might be the law, but it didn't keep us from carrying the 2 Colt revolvers in our pommel bags because they were sort of concealed. However, only our 2 pistols were listed on our CCWs, so we were really pushing the law. Considering what we had in the shelter armory, the Colt revolvers were small change. We also considered the open carry prohibition to apply only to handguns and carried one 590A1, one 1895 and two model '94s among us, just I case.

Any number of State Troopers and Game Wardens had observed us riding over the years and we always carried those particular weapons. We had never been hassled. We rode in areas that could be considered hunting areas and a Game Warden had the right to inspect firearms in any area that could be construed to be a hunting area. If they asked, the law required compliance, or else. Maybe they thought that a middle aged couple or party of four wouldn't be hunting in broad daylight in the warm months of the year.

The boys didn't come home for any of the holidays; maybe they were just saving up their small Stipends. With Sean and Colin at the USCGA, we no longer received foster parenting fees but as of 12/31/10, gold was around \$1,405 and silver was around \$30.60. So, in a manner of speaking, who cared?

Our ongoing buying program of precious metals saw me with about 1,250 silver Eagles and 150 ounces of gold Eagles in the various denominations. Joanne had expanded her holdings of junk silver to \$10,000 face value and her gold holdings remained the same as before. But, she still had more gold than I did due to the amount of gold she'd taken from her father's safe. In fact, she had 174 ounces, half in one ounce coins and half in fractional coins, mostly one tenth and one quarter ounce denominations.

Her \$6,000 face added to the \$3,000 face and the additional \$1,000 face she'd bought when she said she had enough for another \$1,000 face got her to the \$10,000 face and a few extra rolls. She had then turned to buying gold, when she could, generally fractional gold coins. We'd bought a used gun safe for the armory and used it store the gold and silver.

Our LTS included 16 deluxe units from Walton Feed, 4 Ultimate Pak Food Reserve Units from Nitro Pak and 8 Premium 2000 Year Supply of Food from Emergency Essentials in addition to 1 year of STS for 4.

We did Independence Day with Jack and Marion and they had commitments for Thanksgiving and Christmas. We went with our usual fare for those times, filet, baked and Caesar salad.

Bob and Jill had, for all the years I'd been in the Army, swapped family Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations. The only time they didn't was Thanksgiving of 2006 when we hosted. When Obama's election resulted in panic buying of firearms and ammo, we instead took our boxer primed brass and had it reloaded, some for the 1st time and some for the 2nd.

Over the last four years, North Korea had tested two nukes, a fizzle in 2006 and one that apparently worked in 2009. About a year later there were reports that they had successfully conducted a fusion reaction. That made 9 for sure and Iran appeared to be working at breakneck speed enriching uranium. And with their reactor coming online, they'd have spent fuel rods to process for plutonium. We had serious doubts about the arrangement to return spent fuel rods to Russia.

There was a second issue, the centrifuges used to produce highly enriched ^{235}U . The first bomb dropped on Hiroshima was a gun type bomb which used highly enriched ^{235}U . A dangerous technology the US mostly discarded it in favor plutonium. However, how did members 6 – 8 construct their initial bombs? How had member 9, North Korea, constructed their first bomb, the fizzle?

◦

On the US political scene, Obama was seeking a second term. The Republicans were in a dither. The early debates included some or all of the following: Michele Bachmann, Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, Tim Pawlenty, Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum. Then, Texas Governor Rick Perry threw his hat into the ring. And later, a businessman, Herman Cain joined the roster of possible candidates. He almost immediately became subject to sexual harassment charges by several women and withdrew. There were a lot of debates and we stopped watching them, they we going nowhere in a hurry.

Then bias charges were filed with the FEC and FCC by the Gary Johnson campaign and the bias charges were made by the Bachmann & Paul campaigns. We couldn't tell, had Donald Trump thrown his hat in the ring? It appeared that Newt might have the lead between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Mitt won the Iowa caucus by 8 votes over Rick with Ron Paul showing a respectable third.

◦

We suddenly lost interest; Iran tested its first nuclear weapon, a fission-fusion-fission device, apparently of the Teller-Ulam design which was used by most nuclear powers. I was on the phone to Emergency Essentials while the announcement was still running, ordering 8 Premium 2000 Year Supplies of food. As soon as that transaction was com-

plete, I was on the internet ordering more ammo. I called and ordered the propane, diesel and gas topped off and asked for two barrels of the clear kerosene. Next, I ordered 6 additional barrels of Castrol 15w-40. Finally, I got on the phone and ordered enough filters to the RS 30000 for about four years.

While I was doing those tasks, Joanne was off lining up additional supplies of hay, straw and COB. She checked and they had anthracite coal so she ordered four loads.

“Jack, David, did you hear?”

“Hear what?”

“Iran tested a hydrogen bomb.”

“No shit?”

“Turn on Fox News. Call me back when you have the story.”

I turned back to watching Fox, so when the phone rang, I was expecting Jack.

“David, Joanne. I got what the horses needed and paid for it. They had anthracite coal and I ordered four loads but only had enough cash for the first two loads. I have a bundle of cash in an envelope in the safe marked Joanne and I have more in my underwear drawer in the bedroom.”

“I’ll get the money from the safe.”

“Afraid of my undies? You don’t have trouble taking them off.”

“I don’t like going through your things is all.”

“Chicken.”

“It’s about your right to privacy and it’s not up for debate; do you have more to do?”

“Just Wal-Mart to fill the holes in our STS. I’m going to order the bagged chicken quarters, breasts only, and ham, bacon, sausage and butter. I have the list of what we’ve used up. I may buy turkeys if they have them on sale. Did you get everything done you wanted to?”

“Yes, I did. I’m just waiting for Jack to call back.”

“Ok, I’ll be home when I get there, I’m glad we added the toppers to our trucks. Bye...”

Hell, she was sexier now than when we’d first met as juniors and at the time I was filled with runaway hormones.

“David, Jack. Man, I don’t know what to think. It doesn’t look good. How about we move most of our weapons, ammo and matériel to your armory?”

“I’ll be here. We have several deliveries coming including fuel, coal, oil and I presume straw, hay and COB. I’ve been on the internet and the phone placing several orders with two day delivery on every bit of it. If you need money for propane, I can...”

“We’re full up on most everything. We even have two of the Walton Feed one year deluxe packages.”

“It’s up to you, but you’re welcome to store them in the shelter’s store room.”

“I think I will. I’ll load them on the trailer and be there in a while.”

I balanced my MMA and checkbook. I could write checks for most of what was coming, but I went to the safe and got both of our envelopes of cash, just in case. When the propane delivery truck showed up and topped off the tank, I offered to write him a check. He said the office would bill for the delivery. The same happened with the diesel/gas/kerosene delivery, they’d bill me. The guy delivering oil handed me an invoice and said check or cash would be fine.

The elevator delivered the COB and after filling both bins asked where I wanted the rest. I pulled the boat out of the garage and laid a tarp on the floor of the boat stall, telling the guy, “there.” The delivery of the COB was *prepaid*.

When they brought the first two loads of coal, they gave me an invoice and unloaded the first two loads near the coal chute. They waited to leave until I paid for the last two loads. I decided to unload some of the cash and took enough out of each envelope to pay for a single load. They asked where to drop the next two loads and I told them as close to the first two loads as possible.

The next series of deliveries was the hay and straw, a lot of it. I put down tarps and they tossed the hay bales and I stacked them. As soon as the truck was unloaded, they said they were going for the next load. About the time I got the bales stacked, they were back with a second load of hay. I quickly added a second hay tarp and they pitched bales.

This time when they finished, they said they were going for the first of two loads of straw. I took a five minute break and finished stacking the hay, six layers deep. I got six more tarps out and put down two to stack the straw on. I had the hay covered but not roped when they returned with the first load of straw. This time, I stacked it one layer deep and worked towards the truck. Then, I started the second layer and the third. They left and I stopped to rope the hay. That coiling arrangement I’d used worked as I hoped it would.

Sweet Dreams – Chapter 24

Everyone must be getting tired, I was. I had the last of the first load of straw stacked when they showed up. Once the straw was off loaded, they helped me stack it and cover it with the tarps and rope them. I gave each of the guys a Grant for helping out.

With all the deliveries filled for today that I expected, I went down to the basement and spent about 45 minutes rerouting the ducting to the coal/wood furnace and another hour installing the stoker. Mid-way through the process, Jack came down the stairs with his arms filled with firearms. I moved the cabinet and opened the blast hatch and the armory door. Once we had the weapons racked, he went up for a second and third load.

“Would you give me a hand with the crates of LAWs?”

“Crates?”

“Yeah, I got two crates of the new ones they’re using over there.”

After we had the crates of rockets moved, he started hauling ammo and I completed installing the stoker and started a wood fire in the furnace. Once it was going good and starting a bed of coals, I shoveled the stoker full of coal and turned on the stoker power switch. With that set, I turned off the gas valve to the propane furnace and helped Jack haul the remainder of his ammo and the two Walton Units.

“We added that extra bedroom when the boys moved in back in 2005; you might as well think about bringing over some extra clothes for Marion and you, just in case. And you know that Joanne doesn’t need feminine supplies. You need to stock the storeroom with whatever Marion uses.”

“Ok, we’ll stop at Wal-Mart on the way back. I’ll call her and have her get some clothes around. Probably should bring the drovers coats, slickers and dusters.”

A drover coat and a duster are essentially the same type of garment. Our drover coats came from Australia and bore the Outback label. Our dusters were slightly lighter in weight and made in the USA. The slickers were modern reproductions of the original slickers from the previous centuries. Much of what was currently available was inspired by Clint Eastwood’s early *spaghetti westerns* of the man with changing names. In the first, he was Joe and the second, Monco and the third, Blondie. In those movies, Clint wore a poncho. Since Clint only had a nickname in each of the three westerns, the US distributor marketed the movies as the *Man with no Name* films.

These were filmed around the same time as the Trinity films starring Terence Hill and Bud Spencer (made up names). Both men are Italian. The first film was titled *They Call Me Trinity* aka *My Name is Trinity* and the sequel was titled *Trinity Is Still My Name*. Ah, to good old days.

“You need to help me unload David. I sure hope we have enough freezer room.”

“We can store some of it in the coolers and you can call the appliance store in Mountain Home and have the dealer deliver another 25ft³ chest freezer. We can have them get it to the basement and we’ll move it to the storeroom in the shelter. Tell them you’ll pay extra for immediate delivery.”

“I know it looks like a lot, but I only got halfway down my list; I have to go back and finish the list. Besides the things I ordered, which will be here tomorrow, I got what they had on hand. You can bag it in seal-a-meal bags while I’m gone.”

“Do we have enough bags?”

“There are several rolls of bags in the shelter storeroom. Look down the third aisle.”

We got everything unloaded and she headed back to Wal-Mart. You should realize from my description of the construction of the storeroom that it wasn’t uniform in dimensions. At the far end, it was inset by half the width of the generator room less half the width of the tunnel. Once past the generator room, it was wider with the wall being not the generator room wall but the tunnel wall. Aisle three was the aisle that started with a double row of back-to-back shelving and ended with a single row of shelving against the generator room wall. We kept most of the *oddball* items on those three sets (9’) of shelving; things like extra rolls of seal-a-meal bags, replacement rubber rings for the Tattler lids, etc.

I think that I should also point out that recently, gold had been as high as \$1,900 and was currently around \$1,750 while silver had been as high as \$49 and was currently around \$33.25. In my opinion the breaking news would send the price gold and silver into orbit and we could easily see \$2,400 – \$2,500 gold and \$60 silver. The 50:1 ratio was only a guide and it was based on the values on the one ounce silver Eagle (\$1) and the one ounce gold Eagle (\$50). The current ratio was about 52.6:1.

“I don’t know what’s so damned important about getting the freezer immediately, but you got it. Here’s the invoice. Where to you want it?”

“Put it in the basement please, I’ll have the cash when you’ve finished.”

It was the owner and one of his deliverymen. I noted he’d tacked on a \$50 delivery charge so I just paid that and did not give him a tip. It took them a bit to get it in the basement and the deliveryman wanted to know if I wanted it unboxed.

“No, just leave it in the box; I have to move it to its final position.”

“That’s it boss, he says to leave it in the box.”

“We have complaints when we don’t unbox appliances, so I always ask.”

“That’s fine, thank you. Here you go, I assume you take cash.”

“Yes sir, this note is legal tender for all debts, public and private and is backed by the full faith and credit of the US government.”

“*You hope,*” I thought.

Jack came back with second, partial, load and had Marion with him. Both were carrying canvas shopping bags which they took to the storeroom. Then, Jack returned to his pickup and grabbed two of four suitcases. I grabbed the other two and we took them to the second shelter bedroom. Marion followed and began moving her things to the dresser and his things to the chest of drawers.

I got the appliance cart and Jack and I moved the freezer to the storeroom, unboxed it and plugged it in.

“Do you think you have enough freezer space?”

“I hope so. Joanne ordered breast quarters, hams, bacon, sausage and butter. I think I’ll call the locker and see if they have a side of beef and a hog available that we could get quickly. It’s usually ten days on the hams and bacon but we have some coming so that won’t be a problem.”

“Well...?”

“They had two hogs and I’m getting one made into sausage except for the loins, bacon and hams. They’ll brine and smoke those. They actually had the hogs broken down and all they have to do is brine the two loins and add them to the smoker. They had a whole beef hanging and he said I could pick it and the remainder of the pork up tomorrow. That should be ok; the stuff I ordered is coming two day air.”

“Two day air? Are you insane?”

“I might be. I don’t know when Israel will respond to the Iranian nuclear test. I seriously doubt it will be very long. I wanted the things I ordered here, not on a UPS semi between Utah and Arkansas. It’s only money Jack, and Joanne and I have a lot of gold and silver. And, I mean a lot!”

“How much is a lot?”

“For example, \$1,000 face value of junk silver contains about 715 ounces of silver. We have \$11,000 face value plus a few odd pieces. That’s 7,865 ounces of silver at \$33.25 or \$261,511.25. I have 1,250 silver Eagles, another \$41,562.50, for a total of \$303,073.75. That doesn’t count the gold and we have a lot of gold too, 324 ounces. Those 324 ounces at \$1,750 an ounce are worth \$567,000 for a combined total, as of

December 1st, of \$870,073.75. I expect that gold may go to \$2,400 or higher and silver to as much as \$60.”

“You’re rich.”

“Very comfortable and that’s why I’ve always told you that money wasn’t an issue if you needed something.”

“You can pay \$750 for your half of the LAWs.”

“Chump change, here you go.”

“How much is in those envelopes?”

“Well, I think both started out at \$10,000 but I had to pay for two loads of coal and that freezer. I don’t know, count it if you want.”

“I’d probably have a heart attack, I’ll pass.”

“I’m back. If everyone will give me a hand, we can get everything put away. Did they deliver the freezer? Did you get everything bagged and in the freezer?”

“Yes and no. But I’m over halfway done. I ordered a side of beef and two hogs. The beef and all of the pork except for the smoked meat will be ready tomorrow. The smoked meat will be 10 days.”

“Marion, could you scrub and start four baking potatoes? When you get to the two packages of filets, leave them out. We’ll have filet, baked potatoes and Caesar Salad for supper if that’s ok? David since it s so cold out, be sure to start the grill and get it hot before you start the steaks.”

Did I tell you the Joanne was a bundle of energy? We got married on 9/11/01 and it was between Christmas (2011) and New Year’s (2012). She’d been on a dead run most of the day and was acting like a director directing Handel’s *Messiah*. It had been a long and tiring day and very upsetting. There had been all kinds of sanctions imposed on Iran over their nuclear program. And, despite the fatwa, Ahmadinejad had gone ahead and built and tested a hydrogen bomb or warhead, who knew?

Lots of people knew whether it was a bomb or a warhead, but all of those who knew declined comment. The White House was *investigating*, CNN said bomb and Fox said warhead. And Vladimir Putin was *looking into the matter*. Of course he had all kinds of problems at home over the voter fraud protests. If anything, his strong suit was that he hadn’t overreacted.

We, on the other hand went into overdrive. It was one of those would you rather have it and not need or need it and not have it situations, that Joanne had literally drummed

into my head. In two days we'd have most of our bases covered, assuming we had two days. During my twenty-eight years of active duty, I'd never seen a situation that unfolded instantaneously. That didn't mean it couldn't happen, it just meant that I'd never seen it happen.

At the 45 minute point I lit the gas grill to get it smoking hot by the time the potatoes started to get soft. Baked potatoes have that initial softening before they're soft to the core. The grill might use a tiny bit of extra propane, but it would be hot when the potatoes were just about ready.

We had everything put away. The pantry was filled from our STS and the STS foods were filled in with the day's purchases and dated. If you wanted your STS to be good, you had to rotate the food and we dated it with the date of purchase. That didn't mean it hadn't sat in a Wal-Mart warehouse for a long time, but that consideration was beyond our control.

If one thinks about warehousing, it becomes mind boggling. The packer packs the food and places it in their warehouse until it is sold; the buyer puts it into their warehouses from which it is distributed to their retail locations. And, then it sits on the store shelves, hopefully rotated, until you buy it. And if the consumer, like us, maintains a one year supply of STS, it may sit another year before it is opened. A person has no choice except to use the first-in, first-out inventory method. The same applies to a lesser degree to LTS foods.

After dinner was done and the dishwasher loaded and running, we put on the television and watched Fox News. Joanne nodded to the bar and I checked with Marion and Jack. She would have a Margarita, please, and he would have a taste of Single Barrel. So, I put together a Margarita for two with the 1800, etc. poured three fingers of Single Barrel and concocted a Rusty Nail, "pour the Scotch and Drambuie into an old-fashioned glass almost filled with ice cubes. Stir well. Garnish with the lemon twist." Screw the lemon twist; just use equal amounts each of Chivas and Drambuie on ice.

That was a very satisfactory Rusty Nail.

Fox was speculating when Israel would respond to Iran's action. The Israelis declined comment. Meetings were being held behind closed doors, everywhere. The last of our troops had left Iraq early, on the day after Christmas. We still had contractors there, but they were contracted by Iraq, not the US. And, there weren't many, despite earlier fears. Iraq made it very plain there would be few and they would choose them. As a result, Blackwater USA aka Xe, LLC was out. So were most of the big name contractors.